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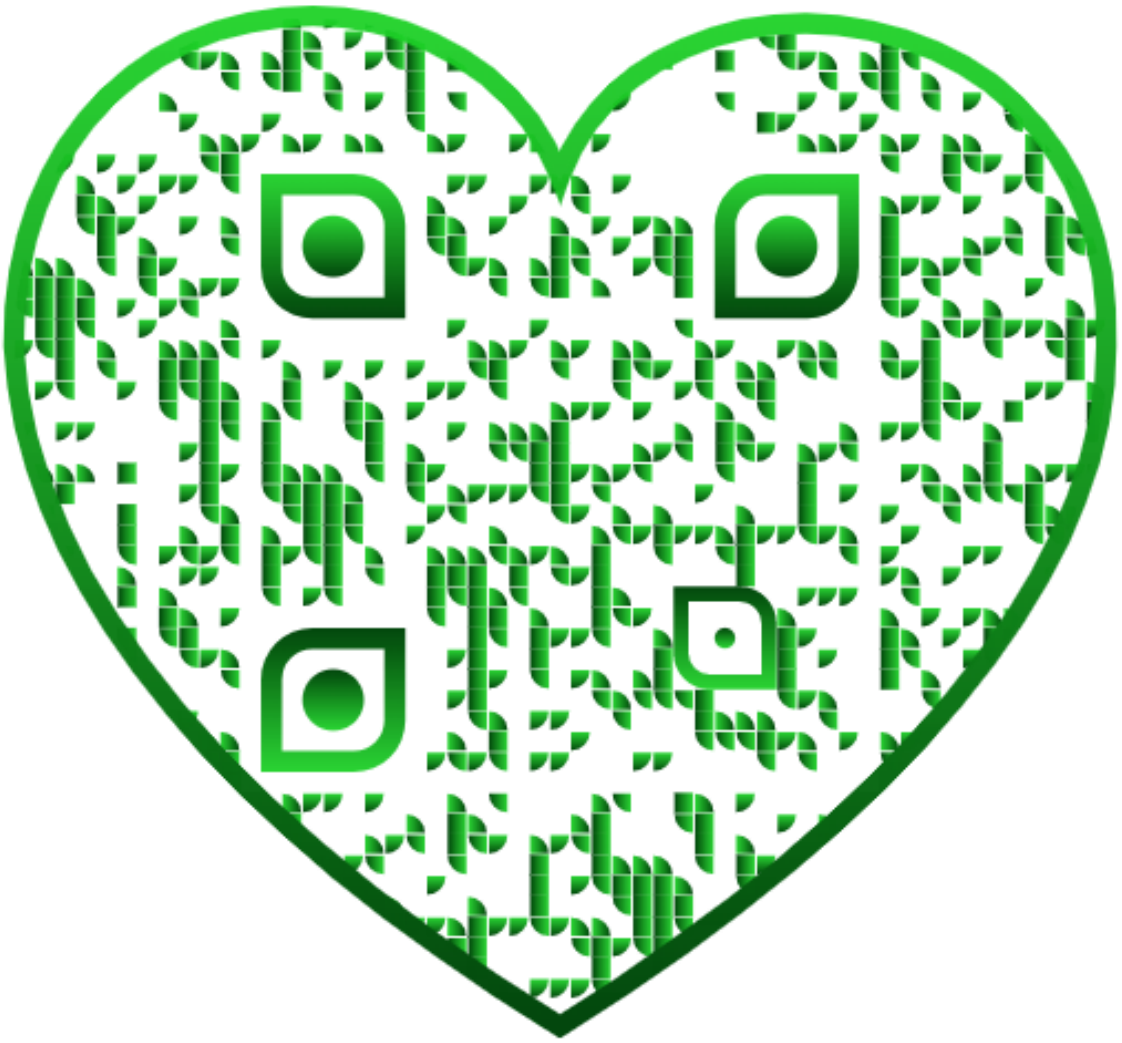

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Happy New Gear!

Somehow, we find ourselves in the year 2017. It sounds like a date straight out of a sci-fi novel, but don't worry, we're still just about permitted to hang on to the vacuum tubes and machines of wood, steel and string that were designed in the 1950s and still capture our imagination like nothing else. New gear – even if it looks an awful lot like old gear – is still a thrill, and if you want a taste of what 2017 has in store from some of the biggest names in the industry then turn immediately to p23, where you'll find the results of our interrogation of 25 leading guitar, amp and effects brands.

Despite our medieval approach to obtaining information, some representatives of the aforementioned companies managed to remain relatively tight-lipped. Happily, others spilled the beans and some even provided pictures of their forthcoming launches. As you read this, the *G&B* team will be turning our houses upside down in frantic attempts to locate our passports in preparation for The NAMM Show in sunny Anaheim, California. We'll be reporting live from the show on guitar-bass.net and our various social media channels – if you want to find out about the best new gear first, our Facebook page is the place to be from 19 January onwards. If you haven't already, head to facebook.com/theguitarmagazine and like our page to ensure you don't miss out on the latest news. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this month's mag. See you next time...

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Turn to **page 20** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

PAUL GREGORY

G&B's test pilot is the guitarist in Newcastle band Lanterns On The Lake, who are signed to the Bella Union label. When he's not on tour, Paul spends his time trawling eBay to feed his addiction to fuzz pedals and is also a mix engineer.

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© Marc McGarraghy

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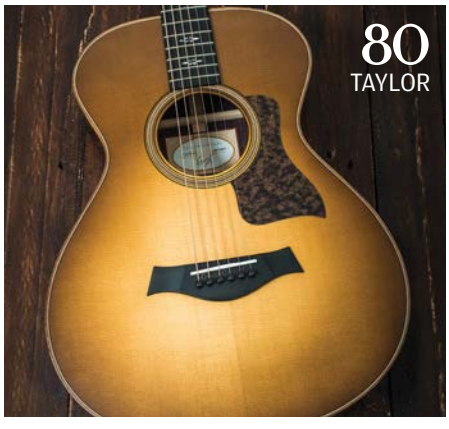

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Opening bars...

Meet Guthrie Govan at an exclusive *G&B* event.
Plus! Win two Walrus Audio pedals worth £468!

G&B Presents... Guthrie Govan

G&B readers will get the chance to meet virtuoso Aristocrats guitarist Guthrie Govan on 16 March 2017 at legendary London venue The Water Rats. Guthrie will be hosting a two-hour guitar masterclass and taking questions from the audience.
This will be an exclusive event in an intimate environment, with no more than 90 tickets available.

A VIP package limited to 20 people, which includes a pre-show meet and greet session with Guthrie and reserved premium seats at the front of the venue, is also available. Buyers of the VIP package will receive a welcome drink, a Guthrie Govan CD and a copy of *G&B*.

Doors open at 7.15pm, with Guthrie's masterclass kicking off at 7.45pm. A special discount ticket price of £30 is available to *G&B* subscribers, with VIP tickets starting at £55 for early birds. For full details and to book your ticket for this unmissable event, go to: **bit.ly/guitarandbassguthrie**

WIN!

WALRUS AUDIO PEDALS WORTH £468

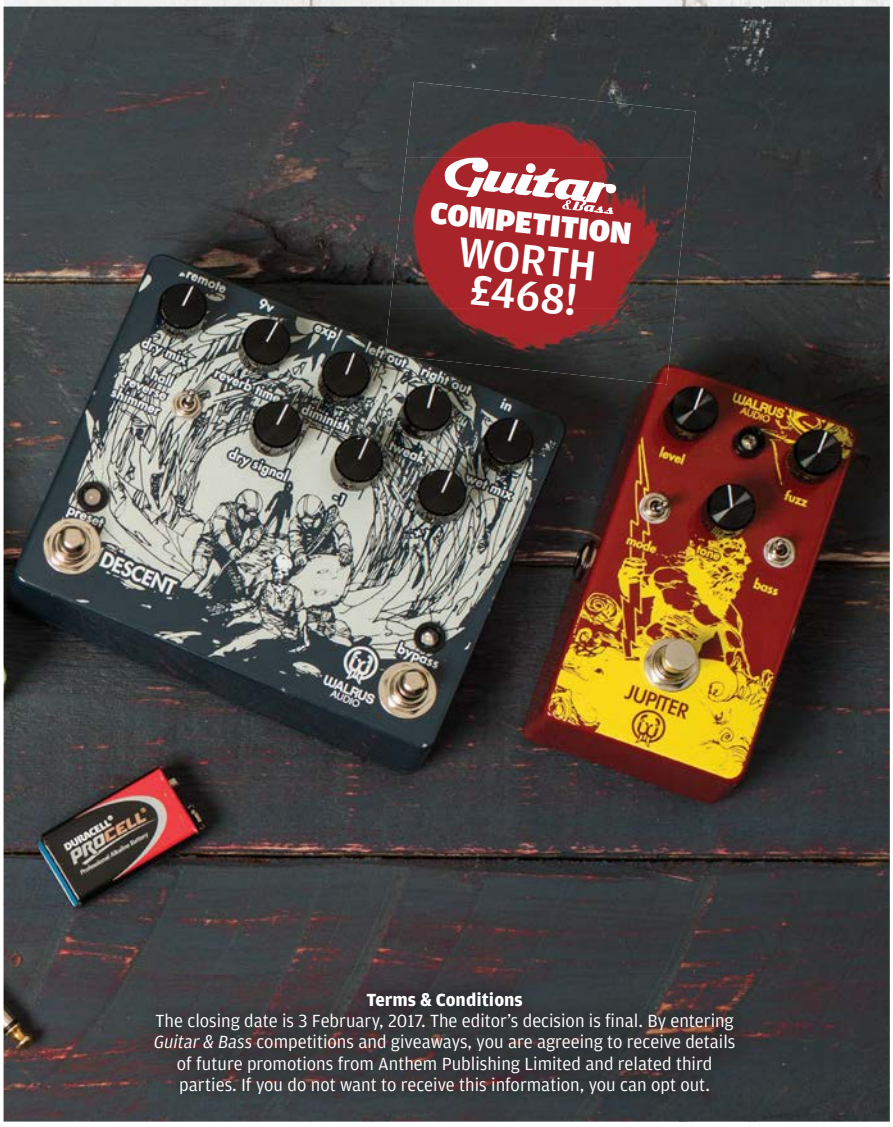
Enter our competition to win the Audio Descent reverb/ octave and Jupiter fuzz pedals from Walrus Audio

This month, *G&B* is giving one lucky reader the chance to win a pair of new stompboxes from Oklahoma pedal manufacturer Walrus Audio. The Descent is a high-quality stereo reverb/octave pedal with Hall, Reverse and Shimmer modes. The Jupiter is a multi-clip fuzz pedal that impressed our reviewer Richard Purvis in the December issue of *G&B* with its "addictively sweet tones". For more information on Walrus Audio pedals, go to **walrusaudio.com**. To be in with a chance of winning this awesome prize, visit **guitar-bass.net/comps/walrus** and correctly answer the question below. One reader, chosen at random, will win both pedals.

Competition question:

What is the name of the new Walrus Audio analogue chorus/vibrato pedal?

a) Abbie **b)** Britney **c)** Marilyn **d)** Julia



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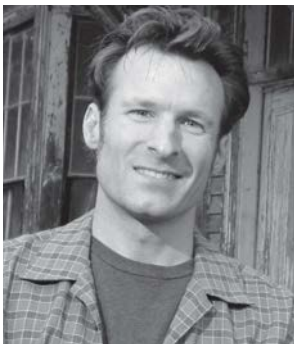
Letters from America

Touring guitarist turned amp builder Todd Sharp is responsible for the JOAT series of highly original designs. **DAVE HUNTER** plugs into the 45RT



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

If you want to check out the pedigree of a guy who knows tone, just dip into Todd Sharp's CV: not only has he been one of Nashville's premier amp techs for years, but before that he was a top-flight studio and touring guitarist, supporting the likes of Rod Stewart, Christine McVie, Delbert McClinton, Hall & Oates, Bob Welch and Mick Fleetwood. During his playing career, Sharp owned not one but two legendary Dumble amps, rare creations built to his own specifications by the fabled Alexander, while also favouring vintage AC30s and other delectable creations.

Even before he started making a living from touring, Sharp knew a thing or two about what was going on inside these sonic wonders. Having been an electronics enthusiast as a child, he built his first valve radio transmitter at the age of seven. Yes, seven. The necessity of keeping Sharp's AC30 on the road maintained his solder skills ("The damn thing blew up so often, I had to fix it every third time I turned it on"), and once he'd had enough of the road in 1994 he founded Nashville Amplifier Service, which has been going great guns ever since.

A couple of years ago, after servicing and modifying the rarified amps of the stars for two decades, Sharp decided to put his compiled thoughts and theories on great valve tone into a design of his own, the JOAT (Jack Of All Tone).

Meet the family

The club-sized JOAT 20RT was the first out of the door, with the extremely original Sharp preamp design coupled with a 2x EL84 output stage. More recently, Sharp has delivered the JOAT 30RT (an unusual 2x 6V6 + 2x EL84 concoction, used by Keith Urban), and the JOAT 45RT – which we have here. The big boy of the range, this one is powered by a pair of EL34s, but also configurable for KT66 or 6L6 output valves. AC-to-DC rectification comes from a GZ34. The RT stands for 'reverb and tremolo', both of which are far from the common mould.

The great bulk of the JOAT's impressive originality happens, though, in its front end, where Sharp taps a 6AU6 pentode preamp valve (and an American-made NOS example at that) in an entirely unique circuit, which has no standard EQ controls but gives you three rotary switches to sculpt your voice.

As Sharp puts it: "It's all tone, but you can take some away if you like." To wit, a five-position Attitude switch takes you from tame to tirade, with subtle frequency shifts along the way; a six-position Low Cut knob dials back the bass; and a six-position High Cut control does likewise for treble. Dual inputs give you high- and low-sensitivity options, and a three-way Bite switch brings more edge and sting from the upper-mids, when desired.

The reverb circuit is driven by an EL84, and boasts knobs for Drive, Tone and Level – which govern a complex dual-tank system. The valve-driven opto tremolo offers the usual Speed and Depth. Round the back, the JOAT 45RT carries dual speaker outs with a switch for 4/8/16 ohms, a switch to select maximum or reduced headroom and a 0/180° relative phase switch to align the amp with other amps or cabs. Inside, workmanship and components are all first-rate. Sharp uses hefty ohmite power resistors, along with one-watt carbon comps, F&T filter caps, expensive mil-spec PEC potentiometers and at least six different makes of signal capacitors – that I can see. That first pentode valve and the dual spring tanks are both on aircraft-grade isolation mounts, custom-spec transformers come from Magnetics Components and Mercury Magnetics, and 19-strand Teflon-coated mil-spec wire pulls it all together. Yet there's also an appealingly

Despite Sharp being a former Dumble owner, there's little of that style of amp in here

KEY FEATURES

Todd Sharp JOAT 45RT head

- **PRICE** £3,199 (approx, excluding shipping, VAT and other duties)
- **CONTROLS** Preamp: Volume, Bite, Attitude, Low Cut, High Cut controls. Reverb: Drive, Tone, Level (with pull-switch for Bright). Tremolo: Speed, Depth
- **OUTPUT** 45 watts
- **VALVES** 1x 6AU6 and 3x 12AX7 preamp tubes, 1x EL84 reverb driver, 2x EL34 output tubes, 1x EL34 rectifier
- **FEATURES** 4-, 8- and 16-ohm outputs; headroom switch; relative phase switch; two-button footswitch for reverb and tremolo
- **DIMENSIONS** 635x266x298mm
- **WEIGHT** 56lbs/25.4kg
- **CONTACT** toddsharpamps.com

'high-end-homebrew' element to the build, which leaves me thinking, 'Yeah, someone actually made this... and it probably sounds extremely cool'.

And it does. I tested the JOAT 45RT through a TopHat 2x12 cab with one Celestion Alnico Cream (Sharp's preference for this amp) and one early-80s Celestion G12-65. I also ran it through a StoneAge 1x12 with a late-60s EV SRO alnico 12-inch speaker, using a Gibson 1959 Les Paul Reissue, a '57 Telecaster and a Scott Heatley Parisienne, into which I've loaded a nifty pair of 1959 Gibson P-90s.

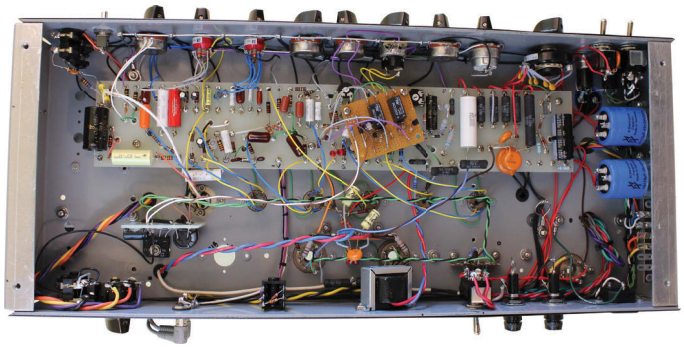
It's worth noting right off the bat that, although this amp lacks conventional tone controls, its clever switches offer a boatload of sound-shaping possibilities; and while this is a vintage-leaning design with no master volume, it beautifully runs the gamut from lush, shimmering cleans to rich, throaty overdrive.

Note, too, that influence-wise, despite Sharp being a former Dumble owner, there's little of that style of amp in here, other than in the JOAT's aspirations to stellar purity of tone and exalted 'player's amp' status. There are, however – although it is achieved very differently – several aural nods to the great Vox AC30s of the early-to-mid 60s, and both the very first renditions of the model and the longer-running iterations of the AC15, which carried a juicy EF86 preamp valve for a similar vibe.

Clear and present

The 6AU6 pentode valve lends a thick, plummy character, but the amp doesn't lack clarity and sparkle. Everything from clean to mean is couched in delectably pillowy harmonic depths, yet individual notes ring out, even within advanced overdrive settings. It's a very enjoyable and inspiring amp to play. While not aping any specific Marshall, Vox or Fender tweed, the JOAT 45RT eats up classic rock, but its heightened dynamics and the way it urges you to dig deep make it an extremely malleable modern lead player's tone tool.

I don't think you'll find a better amp-based reverb, either, and once you get the very appealing tremolo throbbing along within that plush, über-dimensional wash, it's a retro soundscaper or swamp-rocker's dream. It will come as no surprise that the JOAT 45RT is loud, too, packing more volume than many gigs will allow today, and with no onboard means of dialling it down when you reach full-on-overdrive levels. It sounded great tamed through my Fryette Power Station, though, and was also superb played through a Two Notes Torpedo Live into my studio monitors, its sonic breadth and sweet touch sensitivity suffering little through either form of attenuation. Smaller gigs are where the original JOAT 20RT comes into play.



The JOAT won't be for nu-metal heads – although it does take overdrive pedals very well – and if you 'need' an effects loop, well, you won't find one here. Be aware of this, too: the JOAT is big and heavy. Did I slip a disc carrying it around the studio? Maybe, we're still waiting for the X-rays. But this is a professional, touring-grade amplifier that delivers mightily, and plenty of discerning players will be willing to lump it. I can't say I've played through a more sweetly addictive amp in quite some time.

READER BOARDS

Of Kings And Captains guitarist **LUKE WASSELL** wanted a compact, versatile and gig-friendly pedalboard that could also be used for vocal effects. He talks us through his set-up

KIT LIST

Luke Wassell

- **PEDALS IN ORDER**
  Boss TU-3 tuner, Foxpedal Refinery Compressor, Robert Keeley Oxblood Overdrive, Boss DD-7 Digital Delay, Mooer Skyverb, TC-Helicon VoiceTone T1, Rivera amp switch pedal – wired into board
- **PATCH CABLES**
  Fender and homemade
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  Palmer PWT 05
- **BOARD TYPE**
  Home-constructed from scratch, plus a hardwood carry case with leather-wrap finish and Fender-style handle
- **HEAR IT HERE**
  Of Kings And Captains http://bit.ly/2fRT8o5

What inspired this set-up?
"I wanted a board that contained everything I needed all in one place, including my amp footswitch and a vocal compressor. I needed something versatile and quick to set up on a dark stage, and wanted to avoid lots of trailing cables. My band, Of Kings And Captains, use lots of driven tones and I tend not to use too many effects. I play rhythm in the band and wanted my board to give subtle but noticeable sweetness, a little delay, a bit of compression and overdrive to add various stages of 'fatness' to my drive sound."

Tell us a little about the journey
"The pedalboard is completely homemade; it started off as a flat sheet of plywood in my garage. I wanted to house all my favourite pedals in a complete 'gig rig', with a case that would also carry all my leads and spares. I decided to wire in a vocal processor – a TC-Helicon with an XLR in/out for my vocal mic, along with my amp's MIDI control pedal. I wanted everything to plug into the board itself, and not have a mass of cable going off in all directions. It has made gigging with pedals really easy!"

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?
"I'd like to try out the Strymon Flint. I used a tremolo on my band's last record, and I'd love to get one on my board. I'm really into music tech, and Strymon's Deco pedal also looks appealing – the tape saturation is really cool. I've recently added the Foxpedal Refinery compressor, which sounds great! I hadn't heard of them until Jim from James' Home of Tone let me try one out. The blend knob basically gives you parallel compression and the bright switch adds back a bit of treble. It really makes it a standout pedal for me."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"My guitar of choice at the moment is a Gibson ES-335. It's a really versatile guitar, and I love the way it sounds. Amplification comes from my Rivera Chubster 55. The amp has some really great features and, for me, some of the most responsive tone controls I have ever used. It's so easy to sculpt the sound in your head. I swapped out the stock speaker for an Eminence Swamp Thang. I really like how that speaker behaves with the amp."

What lessons have you learned along the way?
"The board has a carry case that I made to help transport it around, it's made of wood and a little on the heavy side, but nothing too much to handle. If I made this board again, I'd probably add a separate set of ins and outs so I could use the FX send and return on my amp. Sonically, I had great fun experimenting with the order of my compressor and drive pedal. I actually ended up using the makeup gain on the compressor to further drive the front end of my amp for some thicker tones."

SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

Raise Your Voice

A New Series | Elevated Features | Limitless Possibilities

Fender | AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL
California

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Paul Gregory

- **TEST INSTRUMENTS** Fender Bassbreaker 18/30, Fender DeVille ML 212
- **PRICES** £649, £959
- **BAND** Lanterns On The Lake
- **MAIN GUITARS & PEDALS USED** Eastwood Airline '59 Coronado, modded Epiphone Dot, Epiphone Les Paul, Maxon OD-9, Way Huge Green Rhino, Fredric Effects Green Russian, Fulltone '69 MkII, Z.Vex Super Hard On, DigiTech DigiVerb, DigiTech DigiDelay, EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run, Line 6 DL4
- **GIGS SO FAR** Rehearsals for UK tour; Bristol Colston Hall

TEST PILOTS
FENDER AMP SHOOTOUT

As Lanterns On The Lake gear up for their UK tour, **PAUL GREGORY** auditions two candidates to be his new live amp. Which one will win?

It's fair to say that 2016 was an odd year. At some point, we appeared to shift into a parallel universe where everything was the same... except everything was just a little bit different, different enough to actually notice.

Theories even began to surface which suggested that we may all actually be living in a computer simulation – no, really. This is a ridiculous idea, of course. However, as I sat in the band's rehearsal room, my guitar was plugged into an amp that says 'Fender' on the front of it, yet is unlike any Fender amp I've ever come across. It says 'Fender' in the manual. It looks sort of like a Fender. It's definitely a Fender, yet... nope, it doesn't make sense.

I'm talking about the new Fender Bassbreaker 18/30, which I have the utmost pleasure of road testing on our UK tour. My usual amp is a Vox AC30. However, more often than not, when we play live the Vox gets replaced by my Blues Junior – the Fender tone seems to fit better with the other electric guitar in the band, courtesy of multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Hazel (Fender Classic Series '50s Telecaster, Vox AC15). The only drawback is that the Blues Junior can get a little lost, volume-wise. So of late I've been contemplating selling the Vox and looking at one of the larger Fender offerings... I've even considered running two Blues Juniors simultaneously.

It says 'Fender' on the front of it, yet it's unlike any Fender amp that I've ever come across

I've perhaps got myself over-excited about the Bassbreaker, so I should mention the other amp I've been sent to try out by Fender (yes there are two – hurrah!), the newest addition to the much-loved Hot Rod series, the Michael Landau DeVille.

With Lanterns On The Lake about to head out on tour, I put these two amps through their paces in rehearsals, with the intention of picking the one that suited me best to take on tour. It wasn't exactly a direct comparison or shoot-out between the two, although there could be only one winner. Both come recommended as excellent pedal platforms, which is very important for what I do in the band. I've always used clean amps with a high headroom, and all my sounds come from my pedals.

At rehearsals, we normally play a set multiple times, so I decided to play the first round with the Bassbreaker and switch to the DeVille ML for the second round.

Fender Bassbreaker 18/30

On plugging in, it becomes immediately apparent that this is not your common or garden Fender. Fender says this amp is what we could have expected if in the 1960s it had focused on rock players rather than country and jazz guitarists. Fitted with EL84s, channel one definitely has the flavour of British amps, yet still retains something ultimately 'Fender' about it.

It's difficult to describe. I've been playing a Vox AC30 on and off for the last five years or so, and I've been fortunate enough to play many different amps on stage and during recording. I'm quite familiar with all the 'usual suspects', yet pinpointing the sound of the Bassbreaker initially escaped me.

As you play, the amp brings out tonal familiarities that at certain points absolutely display Marshall qualities; and then, two notes later, you could close your eyes and swear you're playing a Vox – yet at the same time, it's most definitely a Fender. Confusing. Channel 2 gives a rather darker-sounding result, with only a volume and a single tone control.

I definitely preferred the tone of channel 1, and stuck to it. It was bright, but with a lot of bottom end. The mids have that cutting edge, like a Vox, but the ability to control them with the mids knob is great (I always wished my AC30 had a mid control).

The Bassbreaker takes pedals like a boss, and it sounded great for the most part, although the top end at times felt a little harsh with my guitars, especially when I played really hard. However, I do prefer less top-heavy amps, so this is perhaps down to my personal taste.

Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

I must be honest, I was a little worried about trying this one. I know the Hot Rod series really well – my main gigging amp for the first part of Lanterns On The Lake's life was a Hot Rod Deluxe II; I still own a Blues Junior (with a Cannabis Rex speaker) and I absolutely love it.

However, the one amp in the Hot Rod series I've never bonded with is the DeVille. Tone is, of course, entirely subjective, but to me it always just felt a little harsh – the top >

Fender Bassbreaker 18/30

Fender Hot Rod Deville ML 212

Paul onstage at Colston Hall in Bristol, playing his Eastwood Airline '59 Coronado through the DeVille ML

end sometimes sounded as cutting as a razor blade. I love fuzz pedals, but whenever I tried them with a DeVille I felt like I was fighting with it.

This new version of the DeVille has had a few tweaks. Firstly, there is no drive channel, just two clean channels – and they are identical. I have no use for a drive channel, so that's perfect for me. The first thing I noticed is that the sound of the amp is nothing like I remembered the DeVille being. This thing is the polar opposite of harsh; the top end is warm and buttery, the mids are soft and the low end is unbelievable – massive but never boomy.

The Celestion V-Type speakers inside are absolutely the right choice by Fender. As far as taking pedals goes, I've never come across anything quite like it before – particularly with reverbs and delays. I'm not going to pretend to fully understand the complexities of amp design, but playing with such effects into the DeVille translates into such a 3D depth that you can almost climb into the sound and swim about.

Reverb trails decay with such definition, it breathes new life into pedals I've known for many years. It loves the gainy stuff, too – Rats, Big Muffs, Tube Screamers, a Boss OD-3, Fuzz Faces, a Fulltone '69 MkII, a Way Huge Green Rhino, boost pedals... I chucked a whole bunch of drive pedals at it and all of them sounded wonderful – big and tight and perfectly rounded.

So, which amp gets the nod? Well, the Bassbreaker is really punchy-sounding, and I'd highly recommend it to anyone who wants something different from the pack. Being Fender amps, they are both incredibly loud – Fender makes loud amps, that's what it does. The Bassbreaker gave me similar sounds to my AC30 in an A/B test, but with more control of the mids and that unmistakable Fender thwack. It's definitely a Fender, but the qualities of British amps from Marshall and Vox chime away, too.

However, the amp that I found consistently the most pleasing to my ears was the DeVille. The clean sounds on this thing are just beautiful, and the way it takes pedals is simply outstanding. To be honest, if Fender had sent me only the Bassbreaker, I'd have merrily taken that one, but the DeVille ML really has something magical going on.

Once, on tour in the USA, I was fortunate enough to play a very old, barely recognisable, battered-looking Fender Super Reverb. I was convinced it was going to electrocute me; however, that amp was without doubt the most amazing guitar amp I've ever played through, and I can still remember the clean tone as clear as a bell. This DeVille isn't a vintage Super Reverb. However, it most definitely has that elusive thing I've experienced only at the really top end of Fender amplifiers – so it's the one for me.

The tour got underway with a gig at Bristol's Colston Hall – I'm writing this in the van as we head to London, and we have dates in Leicester, Norwich, Cambridge, Oxford, York, Edinburgh, Kendal and Newcastle. Next time, I'll be reporting on how the DeVille has fared on the road.

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Ryley Walker

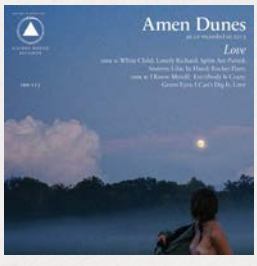
The tireless Illinois troubadour shares some gems from his record collection

Chicago musician Ryley Walker has been in prolific form since releasing his debut record, *All Kinds Of You* in 2014. He followed up with *Primrose Green* and the live-recorded instrumental album *Land Of Plenty* in 2015. Released in August this year, *Golden Sings That Have Been Sung* has made many critics' album of the year lists, and its jazz-folk compositions showcase a restlessly inventive singer-songwriter and guitarist of rare talent.

Derek Bailey
BALLADS

"I've spent many years with this album stuck inside my heart and soul. The weight of every note carries me into some isolated state of mind, where the world pauses for what seems like hours. This record is an endless journey by a complete genius. Turning beloved standards from the 20th Century inside out, and shot straight into your gut with a single guitar."

Amen Dunes
LOVE

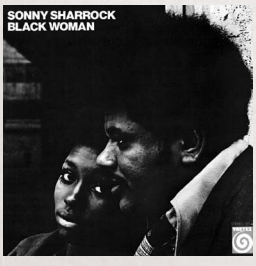


"When this record came out in 2014, I knew I was witnessing something great in real time. This music has lived with me since the first moment I heard it. Every era or stage of my life, I can closely associate with an album or two. *Love* has absolutely defined my mid-20s. For me, it speaks to the times where I just want to feel anything – even if it's fucking sadness."

Wolf Eyes
DEAD HILLS

"I have a beautiful memory of micro-dosing LSD and listening to *Dead Hills* while hiking through the Badlands. I wandered for hours, and some years later I asked Wolf Eyes synth nut and singer Nate Young what the record was about – and he said he was inspired by driving through the very same Badlands. Pure destiny..."

Sonny Sharrock
BLACK WOMAN



"I've listened to this album so many times that I find myself whistling Sonny's guitar lines in the shower all the time. The music is an overwhelming statement of spirituality, dedication and beauty. It's almost as though every single dissonant phrase from Sonny is a war cry – but one that's in the name of love."

Bailter Space
ROBOT WORLD

"Alister Parker is an absolute force of nature to be reckoned with on the guitar. It sounds like a jet engine being turned on, but The Beatles are coming out instead of burning rocket fuel. It's just such a beautiful record to listen to in the summer on a bicycle. I'm absolutely mad for this album and the joy it brings me."

Circuit Des Yeux
OVERDUE

"Haley Fohr is maybe the most detail-oriented songwriter/producer I know. Every detail carries a story that has a beginning, middle and end. When *Overdue* came out, I had a release around the same time. I was absolutely blown away when I put it on. The string arrangements and lyrics were so on point. I thought, 'How the hell can I do better next time?'"

Jim O'Rourke
INSIGNIFICANCE

"This is an album I have listened to over 500 times. It's micro-composed down to the smallest detail, so I hear new things every listen. This record also opened new musical doors in Chicago for me. I discovered there was a beautiful and weird fringe music scene in the city. I started fingerpicking because of Jim's other record, *Bad Timing*. I wouldn't be doing this today if not for his solo records."

Emeralds
EMERALDS

"Emeralds made me so fucking excited about music. I would take a six-hour bus ride to Cleveland, Ohio every chance I had to see them. The Midwest underground was in full force from 2005 to 2010 and these guys were at the top of their game. Their work ethic was transformative for me. They self-released everything and controlled every aspect of their art."

This Heat
DECEIT

"Finally, I had found a punk band that would even freak out punk-rockers. The music was too far out and would go right over their heads. The music feels like part-dub, part-punk, part full-on anxiety attack. I got this record as part of the boxset that came out 10 or 12 years ago, and I haven't looked back since."

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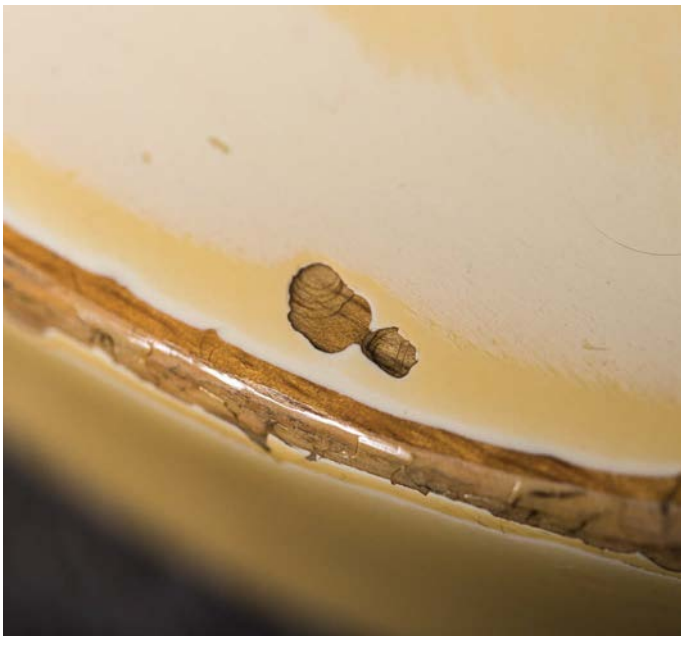
The Money Shot

Last month, the subject of The Money Shot was a gorgeous 1962 Fender Jazzmaster up for grabs at December's Gardiner Houlgate guitar auction in Corsham, Wiltshire. It ended up selling for a mere £1,550 – proof that vintage bargains do still exist if you are prepared to go for a player's grade instrument that's had a few changes. Also in the sale was this 1966 Telecaster, which sold for a healthy £4,400. Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to take a look at what you could have won and hear both guitars in action. The next Gardiner Houlgate guitar auction takes place on 16 March 2017. Head over to guitar-auctions.co.uk to see a preview of the catalogue, and be sure to mark the date in your diary. G

Fender
"TELECASTER"
PAT. 2,573,254 3,143,028



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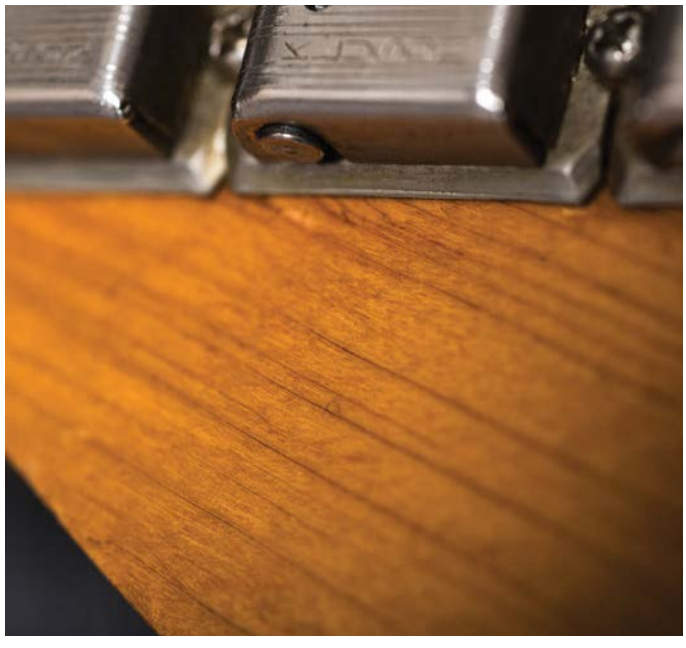

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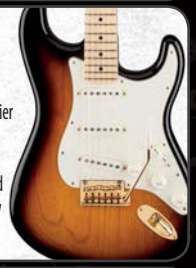

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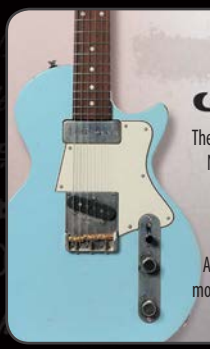

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25 brands to watch in 2017

What new gear will you be spending your hard-earned cash on over the next 12 months? **GARY WALKER** speaks to the biggest and best names in the industry to get the inside track on the new guitars, amps and basses they'll be releasing in 2017...

NEW GEAR REVEALED!

1 BLACKSTAR AMPLIFICATION

A perfect 10 for the G&B Gear Of The Year amp award winners

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Blackstar has had yet another extremely successful year, continuing to grow the brand on a global scale. This year has seen us launch several new products. The Fly Bass is one of our bigger steps forward, as we've created an amplifier that caters for a hole in the market – giving bass players a quality, portable, battery-powered amplifier that can be taken everywhere with them. Another success story is our ID:Core High Power amplifiers, which give players on a budget a fantastic-sounding, super-versatile, giggable pair of amplifiers with incredible features – such as the polyphonic octaver, infinite looper and Super Wide Stereo. This is also the first product range on which we've introduced a stereo effects loop and a programmable foot controller (the FS-12). On the other end of the scale, we released our Artist Series amplifiers – which took some of the DNA of our critically acclaimed Artisan amplifiers as a base, which we then worked on to deliver a PCB-based, vintage-voiced amplifier with modern features such as footswitchable channel switching, studio-quality digital reverb and an effects loop."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"2017 is going to be an extra-special year for us, as it's going to be marking our 10th anniversary – so we're going to be doing something extra special. We're going to be launching several exciting new products at NAMM. We'll be introducing some additional products to existing ranges, and we will also be officially launching ID:Core V2. Mid-2017 will see us entering some new market areas, so keep your eyes peeled."

Joel Richardson, head of marketing

Technical director Peter Hamstead, of Hamstead Soundworks, working on a new chassis – the company is staying tight-lipped about about its identity

2 MARTIN
Pennsylvania's finest hits the two-million mark

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"2016 will be remembered as the year of the dreadnought. This most popular, most copied and ubiquitous of body shapes celebrated its 100th birthday with its originators, Martin Guitar, releasing special, commemorative models to mark the occasion, as well as an award-winning *Ballad Of The Dreadnought* documentary charting the unparalleled role the Martin dreadnought has played in popular music.

Focus on the dreadnought continued with the release of the Junior Series (inset) – a scaled-down (15/16ths) 'little brother' model. The all-solid D Jr. has made owning a Martin dreadnought more affordable, and has proved popular with singer-songwriters, students, travellers and smaller-sized players alike. In addition to the initial Sitka spruce top, sapele back-and-sides model, the range now includes the D Jr. 2 Sapele, an all-sapele model – both versions are available as electros with Fishman Sonitone onboard electrics fitted as standard."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"2017 will see the revamp of Martin's 16 Series with three new models: the D-16E, the DC-16E and the OMC-16E. All three electros will feature Sitka spruce tops and Fishman Matrix VT Enhance electronics.

New Martin Signature Artist Editions will include the Dwight Yoakam DD28 and the John Prine D-28. Special 2017 Martin Custom Shop models include the 000-30 Authentic 1919 and the CS-CF Martin Outlaw-17, which will be limited to 100 instruments. 2017 will also mark the 100th anniversary of the first Martin ukuleles, with special commemorative models being released. The most noteworthy guitar produced by Martin for 2017 will be the one-of-a-kind dreadnought carrying the company's two millionth serial number. To commemorate this milestone model, Martin has partnered with America's premier watchmaker, RGM Watch Co, resulting in a working RGM timepiece being installed into the guitar's headstock.

A maximum of 50 highly collectable D-200 Deluxe guitars will also be released, each with a custom RGN watch."

Steve Harvey, international marketing consultant

3 HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS
Cambridge amp builder keeps it in the family

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"We have to say that it's the continued success of having just one amplifier. For us, this year was defined by an overflowing order book – we actually had plans to launch another product in the spring, but that had to be vetoed. We just didn't have any time. Here we are, eight months later, and we're still a one-amp company! It was always risky creating a clean-sheet amplifier, as that isn't what people traditionally look for. Would people get it? The whole existence of this small family-led business was hanging on it working. It did, and this year we have grown so well. We're thrilled to see so many people with such different tastes, playing in different styles, that find the Artist 20 Series works really well for them."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"A box that allows you to control the Artist 20+RT's four footswitchable functions from a switcher unit, such as a GigRig G2. All four functions and power are provided through one normal guitar cable. It's really handy for a lot of our customers, especially so they can free up some pedalboard real estate. Dan Steinhardt has had one for a while now, and we've shipped some prototypes out to a few artists and close customers. Other than that... no comment!"

James Hamstead, manager

4 ECHOPARK
Californian cool cat moves to the Motor City

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Iggy Pop and Josh Homme choosing the Vibramatic 23 heads and short cabs, along with an assortment of custom instruments and pedals for the Post Pop Depression tour – thus last summer was the highlight of my career so far. Getting to sit with Iggy and discuss the details of the project and thank him for a lifetime of influence... bad and good... was a dream come true!"

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"The new Vibramatic 23 head is out in full tilt on tour with Aerosmith's Joe Perry, Blackberry Smoke's Charlie Starr, and in the recording studio now with Queens Of The Stone Age. The new Echopark Guitar Effect Devices line is set to deliver the F3 Chronic Fuzz, Echodrive pre-amp OD, BB1 clean boost/buffer and the Octapushy octave/drive this winter, via select dealers such as Coda Music, Chicago Music Exchange or from the website. The DT Series is set to launch in March. It will include three bolt-on models and three set-necks, ranging from $2,450-$3,000. They are designed for players who need a top-quality American-made instrument with no compromise to the quality of tones, playability, components or finish. They are something I've been working on for a couple of years. I wanted to fill the void between my standard instruments that can get very involved and completely customised... and offer a simple but non-compromised line of models built in the same tradition of craft and care with the details we all want. Also... Echopark is moving out of Los Angeles to Detroit in June!"

Gabriel Currie, owner

5 PEAVEY
All eyes on January for the US amp big gun

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"2016 has seen Peavey condense its classic 6505 tones into a miniscule, yet monstrous micro guitar head and cab. The 6505 Piranha Micro Head and Piranha 1x8 Cab have proved immensely popular. The powerful, portable 6505 Piranha Micro Head harnesses the notchy thrash and throaty, boosted metal character of the 6505 Series in a miniscule package capable of a mighty 20 watts. Complete with no-frills Crunch and Lead channels, with simple pre-gain and post-gain controls and a single EQ Morph knob, it excels in bedroom, studio and gig environments. The 1x8 Piranha Cabinet is designed to complement the 6505 Piranha Micro Head, and offers players the perfect micro amp stack in a convenient package."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"Peavey will be launching exciting products in January at NAMM – watch this space."

Rob Bennett, marketing, Barnes & Mullins

6 BAD CAT
Thompson's company can't make Cubs fast enough

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"So many things happened last year. Two stand out. After months of negotiations, I bought my partners out of the company. Now, with full ownership and the freedom to shape Bad Cat, I can push the engineering and R&D teams to realise our full potential. The success story was the USA Player Series Cubs. We didn't anticipate the level of demand. Even as we continued to build more amps per batch, we always managed to have them all sold by the time we were finished. Demand has always outpaced our production estimates."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"We intend to regain our focus by pairing down our Legacy line of hand-wired amps to just Hot Cat 30s, Black Cat 30s and Cub III 15s. We will expand our Player Series to include our very popular Classic Deluxe, now with the patented K Master circuit."

John Thompson, president

7 GODIN
Canadian brand reaches the Summit

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"On the electric side, the Godin Summit Classic models. Our take on the set-neck solidbody was offered in a variety of models, which featured numerous finishes and pickups. Our Passion RG-4 was the new bass showcase for 2016. Seagull acoustic models that featured the new Burnt Umber finish and the Concert Hall body shape were some of our greatest additions on the acoustic side."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"We'll be showcasing the latest additions to our brands, including the Godin 5th Ave Uptown, the Montreal Premiere Ltd Desert Blue and a Limited Edition Summit Classic Supreme in Cognac Burst Flame. There'll be a new short-scale Dorchester bass, and new acoustic additions are a revamped Art & Lutherie line, a Seagull 12-string and the Seagull M4 dulcimer and Seagull S8 mandolins with preamps."

Marc Denoncourt, head of marketing

8 TAYLOR
Get ready for the new 800 Deluxe Series

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Two areas of design that spurred compelling new product offerings were in our acoustic 12-fret and 12-string categories. Our modern revival of the 12-fret guitar has resonated strongly with players, thanks to the compact design, slinky hand feel and surprising warmth and husky tonal power for a smaller-bodied instrument. We offer many 12-fret model options throughout the line. We also expanded our 12-string family to feature five different body styles. The Dreadnought 150e remains the best-selling acoustic 12-string in the industry, while our new small-bodied Grand Concert 12-fret/12-string 562ce has been lauded as one of the most comfortable and inviting 12-strings ever. We also redesigned our rosewood/spruce 700 Series to be louder and more responsive, and introduced aesthetic upgrades that include an optional vintage-look Western Sunburst top."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"The 800 Deluxe Series [left], which adds to the suite of tone-enhancing refinements brought to our flagship rosewood/spruce 800 Series in 2014. Updates include a player-friendly arm-rest design, Adirondack spruce bracing and Gotoh 510 tuners. We'll also unveil a series designed to attract a new segment of players. And Taylor's family of compact GS Mini guitars will get a new model. Look for the full reveal at Winter NAMM."

Tim O'Brien, vice president

9 SUPRO
Exciting times for the rejuvenated amp brand

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Without a doubt, the 1695T Black Magick – it's an incredible amp that has got 4/5 star reviews everywhere and has been very popular, especially in mainland Europe. Our individual pedals – the SP1304 Fuzz, SP1305 Drive and SP1303 Clean Boost – have also been enthusiastically received."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"Well, the new 1600 Supreme really nails that classic 60s British Invasion tone, based on the amp used extensively by The Rolling Stones on loads of hits. The brand new 1x10 Comet (1610RT) is the baby of the range – 12 watts with the ability to step down to six watts – with built-in spring reverb and real tube tremolo, too. Speaking of tremolo, there will also then be the SP1310 Tremolo – an individual pedal due to land over here very soon."

Gavin Coulson, product specialist, JHS

10 DR. Z AMPLIFICATION
Dr. Z has three of the best to follow the Z-Lux

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"I released the Z-Lux in late 2015, and it really took off in 2016. Being on stage with the two living Beatles at Ringo's HOF induction was a dream come true for me, and a boost for sales. To date, it has won more awards than any other amp I have designed, and we haven't been able to keep up with the demand for the Z-Lux. I also released a new amp in 2016, called the DB4. It was another collaboration between Brad Paisley and myself. This was the fourth amp Brad and I developed together, hence the name DB4, which stands for 'Doc and Brad's Fourth Amp'. This amp was used exclusively on Brad's latest record."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"I have three new releases planned for 2017. The first is an amp that brings me back to the formula responsible for my 30 years of longevity. Our credo has always been to build a handmade, excellent-sounding amp using only the best components, for a reasonable price. This new amp rides on the coattails of the successful Z-Lux design, like a Z-Lux Jr, 2x 6v6, 1x12 combo, with an introductory price of $1,299. It's called the CURE, and will heal your need for classic tone.

"The second release is a dual-rectified, EL34, Marshall-inspired variant. It covers tones from the tube-rectified JTM50 to the small-box SS-rectified JMP50, through the cascaded gain-stage grind of a JCM800. It's called the EMS, and it captures that elusive Marshall sound. It is housed in a small-box head, and will be paired with our Backline 2x12 cab loaded with two Celestion Creamback M65s.

"The third amp is the Surgical Steel, a 90-watt, KT88-based head. It has a huge bell-like tone, with wonderful clean sustain and full-frequency bandwidth. It is ideal for pedal-steel players, six-string slide, or any player looking for full response and high headroom."

Mike Zaite, founder

A trio of Dr. Z prototypes (l-r): EMS head with 2x12 cab, Surgical Steel head and 1x12 CURE combo

11 FAITH
Patrick Eggle and co launch 2017 models

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"2016 has seen Faith Guitars expand our all-solid tonewood guitar range into a number of new series, including the short-scale Nomad Series travel guitars and the stunning Venus Blood Moon. Designed for players who frequently travel with their guitar, Faith's affordable Nomad Series (above) offers mini versions of the popular Faith Saturn (£459) and Neptune (£469) shapes. Both models use solid tonewoods in keeping with the entire Faith range to ensure tonal richness, and offer travelling guitarists small-scale powerhouses that do not compromise on sound quality. Furthermore, Faith Nomad Series guitars come equipped with a CnR3 proprietary preamp and pickup system, allowing players to easily plug in and perform while on the road. The striking Venus Blood Moon (£929) has been a resounding success in 2016. The OM-style electro cutaway uses innovative Javanese High-Figure Trembesi tonewoods to produce unique tonal characteristics."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"2017 will see the launch of exciting new models, starting at The NAMM Show in January, followed up by other new releases in Shanghai in October. We could tell you what they're going to be, but that would spoil it, wouldn't it?"

Alex Mew, brand manager, Barnes & Mullins

12 CRIMSON
Dorset company on Red Alert for 2017 expansion

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?
"At the start of 2016, we were known as a custom shop and the UK's only maker of luthiers' tools. In January, we decided to start working on a range of production guitars with the goal of launching two ranges at around £800 and £1,400 respectively. Within three months, we had successful prototypes and already had orders from several guitar shops, notably Guitar Galleries and Absolute Music, who are both being fantastic partners and hold over a dozen guitars each. The growing range includes 38 variations across three models, and our custom shop has greatly expanded, too. From creating only a dozen guitars in 2015, we've grown to delivering more than 60 in 2016; this is due in part to investing in top-flight machinery, but in the end, our growing staff of hugely talented luthiers and apprentices from around the globe get the true accolades."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?
"Moving forward, Crimson is expecting to be able to produce around 500 guitars in 2017, across the One, Artist and Raw Series production guitars – as well as a new Songwriters hollowbody and our first production bass guitar. We are expanding our custom shop to include bespoke versions of all these guitars, and are investing in more luthiers and equipment to help both this and the master-build process. This coming year, we are looking for both artists and guitar shops to collaborate with around the UK, Europe and the US. We will also be aggressively expanding our luthier school with the possibility of university accreditation on the horizon, and by the middle of the year our range of luthiers' tools and supplies will rival our largest competitor. Our continued expansion has been a ride of epic proportions – we look forward to what this year will bring for us and for the UK music industry as a whole."
Ben Crowe, master luthier

Master luthier Ben Crowe at work on a copper-top guitar in the Crimson workshop

13 PRS
Look out for a revamp of the entire SE range

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?
"There were three or four models which were particularly significant. Firstly, the reappearance of the CE, loaded with the 85/15 pickups previously only available on the Custom 24. Next up was the McCarty 594. Paul personally re-engineered the PRS 22-fret chassis and hardware, recreating a neck carve from his favourite 1950s neck. The resulting 594, featuring a four-knob configuration and a three-way selector on the upper bout was acclaimed by new PRS user John Mayer as his favourite new guitar. The 594 has gone down in PRS history as the only model to out-sell the Custom 24. Finally, the introduction of two signature SE models for Mark Holcomb (Periphery) and Chris Robertson (Black Stone Cherry). Both were instant hits, the Robertson being the first factory-authorised SE with genuine USA 57/08 pickups as standard. The Holcomb SE is based on Mark's original PRS signature model. The 25.5-inch scale and Duncan Alpha and Omega pickups make it ideal for those looking for modern rock tones."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?
"The launch of several new models in the Core USA PRS range – notably the 594 Singlecut and the 509, a development of the 513 model. The 509 features nine sounds from five single-coil pickups, grouped in a humbucker/single coil/humbucker configuration. The revised pickups and switching system give the player access to the entire palette of quality single-coil and humbucking tones. The 513 is much-used by session players and those who need maximum versatility; the 509's revised switching system is the result of artists' requests and Paul's quest to constantly improve his products. The SE range has had a major revamp and now features new pickups on many models and a PRS signature on the headstock, like their US-made brethren."
Gavin Mortimer, managing director

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AUTHENTIC Vintage Tone SINCE 1958

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FANE™ ACOUSTICS

B&G Guitars' new mid-priced Little Sister Crossroads model

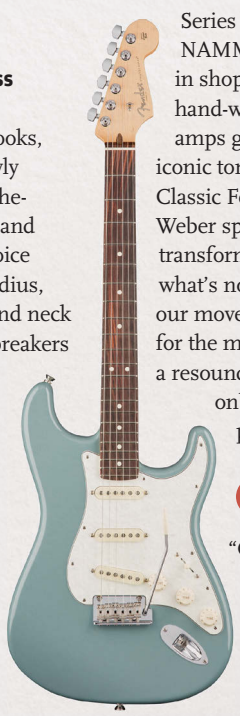
14 B&G GUITARS
Israeli boutique builder gives the Little Sister a new sibling

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?
"2016 has been a great year for B&G. We settled in the new, larger workshop, recruited new builders, and even had *G&B*'s Huw Price over to write about it and take pictures. The new workshop has a capacity of 30 guitars per month, and 2016 has been so kind to us that we actually got to work at maximum capacity. Our circle of happy customers has grown significantly and we became much more stable than in 2015, the year we started selling guitars."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?
"We'll keep doing what we love – building great guitars. We plan to expand our line of products and introduce some of the gear we've been dreaming on since B&G was founded. First, we're going to introduce the Little Sister Crossroads line – a mid-priced version of the Little Sister. We intend to launch it at an unbelievable value-for-money price. I can't share any more info now – I bet guitar players will be super-excited about it. We've just started work on setting up an acoustic workshop, where we plan to build the acoustic twin of the Little Sister. The first model will be introduced around mid-2017. We'll also keep developing our carved-top electric and an amp. We aim for perfection, so development is a long, tedious process. Hopefully to be launched by the end of 2017."
Avi Goldfinger, co-founder

15 FENDER
Big news from the Big F...

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?
"The Elite Series – classic Fender looks, but packed with versatility and newly developed features. It's our top-of-the-range American production guitar and has proven to be a very popular choice with players all year. Compound radius, new contoured heel and a compound neck profile really set it apart. The Bassbreakers have been massive. We wanted to show another side to what everyone considers to be a Fender amp and offer customers something new. It's a darker, more aggressive sound and players and artists have really got onboard. We've kept the dynamics and touch sensitivity associated with Fender amps that players love, but coupled with rich, harmonic overdrive and a wide range of features. The Edge Deluxe, too – the always-popular Fender Deluxe, but tweaked to the tastes of The Edge. Our '57 Custom Series amps were introduced at Summer NAMM, but you may not have seen them in shops as they have been so popular. All hand-wired at our factory in Corona, these amps give players the chance to recreate iconic tones and develop new sounds. Classic Fender dynamics, original circuits, Weber special-design speakers, Schumacher transformers and Pure Vintage yellow caps: what's not to like? The Paramount acoustics, our move into all-solid acoustic instruments for the more serious guitarist, have been a resounding success. They've been taken onboard by a host of artists, and have proved a hit with the public."



Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?
"Our New American Pro range (inset), which is reviewed in this very issue, and many other new and exciting products. Watch this space..."
Russell North, Fender EMEA

16 SANDBERG
The maker of G&B's favourite bass two years in a row has more in store

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?
"The Sandberg Forty Eight was the surprise success. The bass has positioned Sandberg firmly into the 'rock' genre, with its big powerful sound and stylish looks. The Configurator continues to differentiate Sandberg from its competition. The ability to configure your dream bass in the colour you want, to your ideal specification, has been pivotal to the growth of the brand."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?
"The Ida Nielsen signature five-string model. We will also have a new Rammstein signature model. On the hardware side, we have new Sandberg Black Label pickups."
Holger Stonjek, owner

17 RIFT AMPS
Uk boutique amp builder becomes a TV star

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"I have an amp called the PR18, a blackface-style 18-watt 1x12 combo with onboard reverb and tremolo. It's always been my best seller, outperforming everything else 3:1. In fact, *G&B* visited the workshop and built one back in the summer. In 2016, I made a few spec changes, switching over to WGS speakers and Jupiter tone capacitors. As a result, I built and sold more PR18s in 2016 than the previous three years combined. I also launched a fun little amp, based on the premise 'amps that never were, but could have been'. It has always annoyed me that Fender bypassed the brownface era with the mighty Champ and went straight to the blackface model. I spent a few months prototyping the little five-watt circuit, and was over the moon with the result. I currently offer it with optional reverb or tremolo and people love it."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"I've got a few cool things in the pipeline, but the amp that I'm most excited about is a signature model for UK blues guitarist Aynsley Lister. It's been 18 months in the making, and we've spent hours on end dialling it in to get it exactly right. Unlike the traditional R&D process for a guitar amp, we knew the speaker choice from the get-go, and made sure that we tuned the amp to get the best out of them so they truly work in harmony. The amp is just amazing, and it hits the trifecta of amplifier goals – a brilliant clean tone, a sublimely expressive overdrive, and incredibly usable at all volume levels. Expanding on my line of tweed amps, I've recently become very interested in the TV-fronted amps of the late 40s/early 50s, especially those with octal preamp valves. These circuits might be 65-plus years old, but the tones they produce are incredible – and just as usable today as they always have been. Look out for the first of my reissues, coming early 2017."

Chris Fantana, owner

18 VICTORY
Brit amp company introduces a trio of new Heritage Series models

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Victory is still a very new brand in musical instrument terms, as it was launched only in 2013. Yet we've already won a handful of awards in that time, continuing into 2016 with VX The Kraken and The Sheriff 22 and 44. The real success, however, is that our amps are heard and seen increasingly on stages and recordings everywhere, thanks to an enviable artist roster that's headed up by James Bay and Guthrie Govan – and of course an ever-increasing army of professional, semi-professional and enthusiast players."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"Our award-winning V40 The Duchess has been immensely popular as a Compact Series head, so we're adding the V40 Deluxe to the Heritage Series, with a 6L6 power section and valve-driven spring reverb and tremolo. It's a deluxe version of the V40, available as a widebody 1x12 combo and a 480mm traditional wooden head that sits perfectly on our V212 cabs. We've also put our much-loved V30 into an as-yet unnamed 480mm wooden head with a 100-watt, 6L6-driven power stage and two extra footswitchable modes that offer a whole new range of just-breaking-up and mid-gained tones. It's incredibly versatile, has headroom for days and will sit in the Heritage Series alongside the V40 Deluxe and Sheriff 44. There are a couple of other things, but they can wait until the Winter 2017 NAMM Show!"

Martin Kidd & Team Victory

19 KAUER
A new US-made boutique guitar at a knockdown price? We're all ears

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"2016 has been an interesting year for Kauer. We've been working hard on developments for a big product push in 2017. The biggest surprise we had was the response and sales of our accessories line. We were overwhelmed with how positively received our line of modular, stackable instrument storage racks has been. The Banshee and Arcturus continue to be extremely popular, and we've developed three new hollowbody models across the line-up that we're very proud of."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"2017 is going to be a big year for us. We've been working on our new Titan line of guitars for the last 18 months, and will be finally bringing them to market in January. Why is Titan new? It's a completely California-made 'boutique' guitar that features Seymour Duncan pickups, Gotoh locking tuners, Emerson Custom pots, tonnes of flexibility and customisation – and it starts at $1,299. This was a major feat for us to bring out an original design, yet at a price point that's less than half of the average Kauer. We've had Kauers on tour with Gary Hooker from Brad Paisley's band, Josh Scogin of '68, Scott Holiday from Rival Sons, and many more – and the response has been amazing. We're very excited about it."

Doug Kauer, owner

Raise Your Voice

A New Series | Elevated Features | Limitless Possibilities

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Behind the scenes in Dennis Fano's workshop: a reclaimed-pine Serus T under construction

20 NOVO
Dennis Fano's new company has big plans

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Our biggest success from the past year has to be the fact that we have seamlessly transitioned from being a one-man shop to a three-person team. As a result of that, we've been able to work through our long list of back orders and decrease lengthy wait times. Not only that, but our guitars are better than they've ever been. Jack and Matthew have had a huge impact on Novo in a relatively short amount of time. We're planning to relocate and expand the operation even further in 2017. There'll be more about that in the coming months..."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"We will be introducing the Athena model in January. The Athena is an offshoot of our Serus T that was inspired by a guitar that we built for Nick Greer of Greer Amplification. The Athena features a tempered pine body, tempered maple neck, 24.75-inch scale length, Lollartron humbuckers and a Schroeder wrapover bridge. Later in the year, we will be debuting a single-cutaway model called the Solus, a thinline version of our Serus J model and the first Novo bass. We're ecstatic about the future of Novo Guitars!"

Dennis Fano, founder

21 VIGIER
Patrice Vigier unleashes the DoubleBfoot 2.0

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Vigier Guitars, pioneers of carbon-fibre technology, have been exploring colourful new horizons in 2016 through the new Rock Art finish series (inset). I create and apply each distinctive finish, and they're bound only by the random nature of the finishing technique. These individual, one-off designs have become real collectors' pieces and very sought after, they are fun to produce and offer a finish that is completely unique to each guitar. The Rock Art finish can be made with up to four different colour combinations of your choice and is available on most of the Excalibur, Expert, Excess and GV Series instruments. Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal has been one of Vigier's premier artists for a long time now and Vigier has created some fantastic designs just for him (have a look at his actual Bumblefoot guitar, Swiss Cheese guitar or the production model Excalibur Bfoot Signature for examples). The conception of the GV Series was also with Ron in mind, but perhaps his standout guitar has actually been the signature DoubleBfoot, which was first released in 2013 with two different necks – one of these is fitted with Vigier's exclusive fretless, Imetal fingerboard."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"Well, new for 2017 is the DoubleBfoot 2.0 – featuring a new rounded shape, a new secured neck and it also features a lighter weight, which is very important with a double-neck design."

Patrice Vigier, owner

22 ORANGE
Borehamwood's finest plan pedals and more...

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"One of our biggest success stories was the Orange Crush Bass. Orange has been making entry-level bass amplifiers since 2004, constantly tweaking and changing the design over the years. In all honesty, we were aiming just to have a good-value bass amplifier. Other than design, it wasn't trying to emulate any of the high-end bass amps we make. Recent years have seen us making far more high-end bass amplifiers than we had before – the Orange OB1 series used by bands such as Deftones, Milk Teeth, Triptykon and Ignyte being our most popular. So we designed the new Crush Bass around those amplifiers, bringing in our unique Blend control to emulate bi-amping, using two different amps to blend a more distinctive tone and a bigger focus on having cleaner headroom and – of course – bringing in the huge tones of these amps to smaller products. We put a lot more thought into everything from circuit and tonestack to even the visual design to make it unique, and our efforts paid off with you guys giving us a 9/10 for the Crush Bass 50 and 25 and our sales increasing in the entire range."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"We've had great feedback on doing pedals again (we did just a few in the early 70s). We're really having a lot of fun with doing our own thing here, with our technical director designing each pedal pretty much on his own. Expect new pedals with ballsy vintage vibes and looks – some don't even have the Orange branding, as we want someone to see an awesome-looking pedal and only realise later that it came from Orange. We've been developing new combos with really interesting features that stay true to our roots but give our customers an amp they wouldn't expect us to release. We're excited about these and can't wait for you to see them. There's another product I can't mention, a new direction for us, and I think it will give us a way into a new area of the market. Keep an eye out for some new technologies – which aren't just for guitarists."

Charlie Cooper, marketing director

23 GRETSCH
After a big 2016, Gretsch goes back to its Roots

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"It's been a helluva year for Gretsch – we introduced new guitars, new pickups, upgraded guitars, released some amazing Limited Editions... I think introducing the Streamliner Collection has been the biggest story of the year – the first time since the Roots Collection that we've introduced a brand new line of instruments – and also the first time we've been at that price point for hollowbodies and centre-blocks. *And* they had a new, specially designed pickup – the Broad'Tron – as well as cool features such as the Gretsch V-Stoptail. So, all very exciting. Alongside that, the upgrades we've done in the Professional Collection. Aside from clarifying the offering by sorting them into three clear categories (Players Edition, Vintage Select and Artist Signature), the upgrades are simply awesome. The Players Edition now feature all of the things the gigging musician always wanted on a Gretsch – string-through Bigsby, locking tuners, Graph Tech nut, pinned bridge and so on."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"At this stage, I can't reveal much! The products we have lined up are due for official release at the winter NAMM Show... but I can say it's gonna be another big year! We will continue to align our guitars into the categories mentioned, and make sure features are aligned across the different collections. We've also launched a new Artist Signature model, which will be displayed at NAMM: the Cliff Gallup signature model Duo Jet. If you don't know who Cliff was, you should! He played a huge part in the evolution of rock guitar, simply an incredible player, and I hope the guitar we've created to honour his memory does so in a suitably respectful way. Finally, look out for some very, VERY cool additions to the Roots Collection in 2017."

Adam Bowden-Smith, product manager

The new D'Angelico Premier Teardrop

24 D'ANGELICO GUITARS
Legendary New York archtop builder enters the Premier League

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"We are happy to welcome Bob Weir and Kurt Rosenwinkel to the D'Angelico family! We have been getting amazing responses to the new D'Angelico Deluxe series of guitars – featuring Seymour Duncan pickups, six-way pickup-selector switches and Grover locking mechanics. We've also been able to significantly increase our customer base worldwide."

Q What new products can we look forward to in 2017?

"The new Premier Series will be a winner. We will offer our most popular models at an affordable price point. Also, D'Angelico in partnership with D'Addario will introduce our new Electrozinc strings [see review on p92]. Plus, there will be the Deluxe Series instruments in custom colours, limited-edition Premier models – even a double-neck!"

Steve Pisani, president of sales and manufacturing

25 ANDREW WHITE
Acoustic builder continues to set the tone in 2017

Q What were your biggest success stories of 2016?

"Andrew White guitars have been really successful for us at The North American Guitar this year, and we are proud to be the exclusive European representatives for Andrew's guitars. The Andrew White Cybele 100J – an all-Jatoba wood instrument – received a great review in *G&B* [July 2016], as did the slightly bigger, all-solid Freja 1020 model in Sitka spruce and blackwood, which was given a Choice award for its 9/10 review."

Q What new products do you have in store for 2017?

"We will be bringing in more of the Cybele and Freja models, as well as a return for the EOS series that received excellent reviews last year. Andrew White uses some of the more unusual tonewoods found in guitars at this price point, so we look forward to giving more people the opportunity to try out and to purchase Andrew's guitars in 2017."

Richard Poll, The North American Guitar

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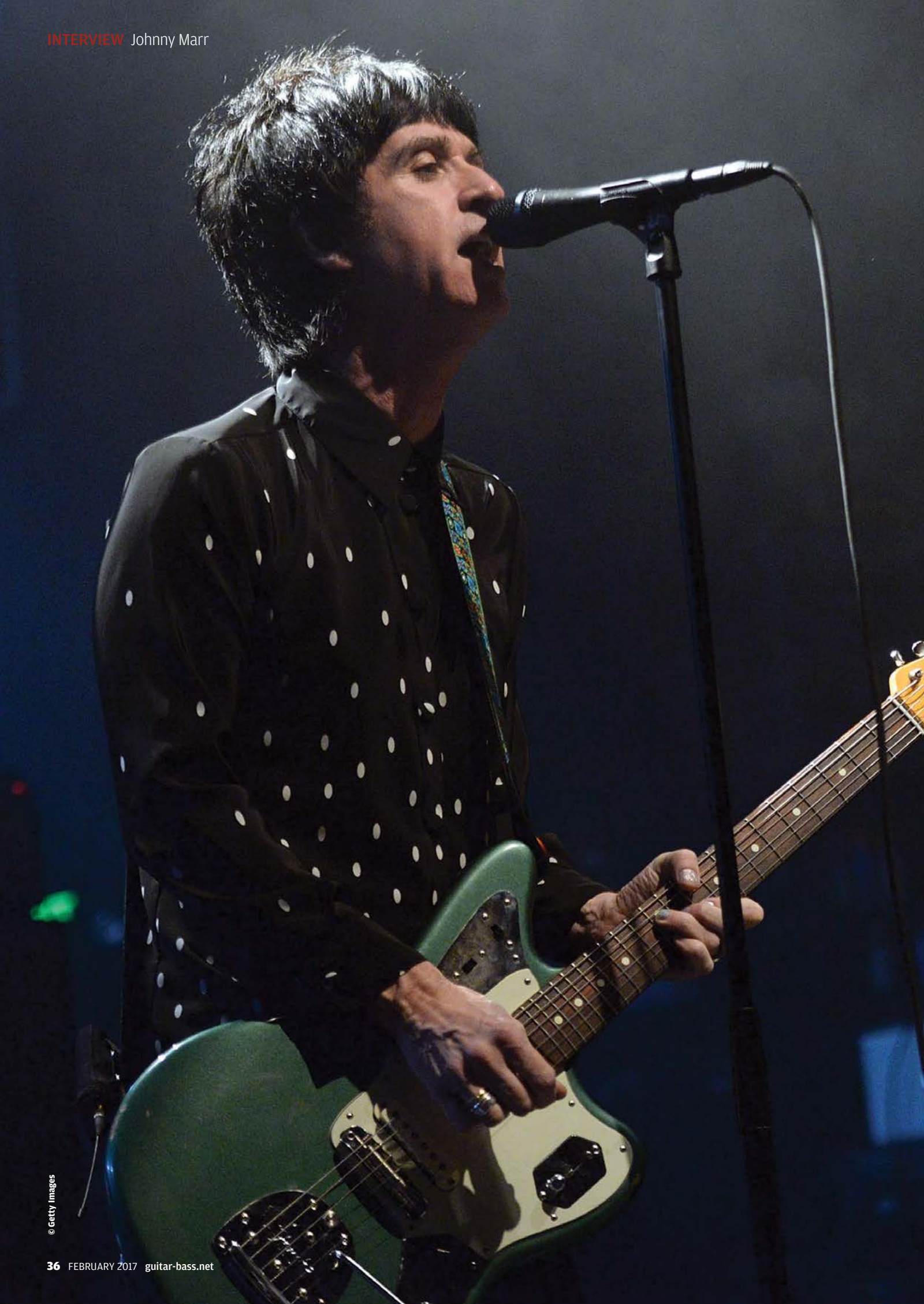

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Marr On Life

The melodic genius at the heart of The Smiths turned prolific collaborator and celebrated solo artist, Johnny Marr has a few stories to tell. Fresh from the release of new autobiography, *Set The Boy Free*, he speaks to *G&B*

Interview **John Earls** Story **Gary Walker**

It's one of the most remarkable facts in guitar music history that Johnny Marr was just 23 when The Smiths split up; he had already achieved more than most musicians do in a lifetime. Since the seismic day in 1987 when Marr and Morrissey went their separate ways, Marr's added many more career highlights – taking on guitar duties in Talking Heads, The Pretenders, The The, Electronic, Pet Shop Boys, Modest Mouse and The Cribs, plus releasing a pair of solo albums. Yet, despite all those musical landmarks, when Marr, now 53, sat down to write his new autobiography *Set The Boy Free*, the release of his Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar series of signature models stood shoulder to shoulder with dizzying highs such as the era-defining albums The Smiths made, their unforgetable gigs and that iconic *Top Of The Pops* appearance. Johnny Marr lives and breathes guitars.

"Having my own guitar with Fender is one of the things I'm most proud of," Marr tells *G&B*. "I'd put it up there with the top three things in my career that I'm most proud of, without a doubt. It might even be the thing I'm most proud of in my career.

"It does blow my mind actually. It's a key point in the book, how me discovering the guitar came about [*Set The Boy Free* opens with a chapter on how a five-year-old Marr was entranced by seeing a toy guitar in a local shop called Emily's]. It's a constant from my life as a little boy who was only five, and that's amazing.

"When I got the first one off the production line in 2012, I took it the next night to play with Chic for the first time. Then I used it on the *Inception* soundtrack. But my son Nile happened to be in London, so he picked it up for me first. On the way back to giving it to me, he got up at The Forum and used it to play that night with Broken Social Scene. So he played with it before I even got to lay my hands on it, the fucker. But there's something nice about passing it on to a new generation.

"That guitar does have music in it. I used it a lot with the orchestra when I was doing the soundtrack with Hans Zimmer, and I also used it on *Spider-Man*. But the amazing thing is every one of those guitars is the same. I have to give Fender the credit for that.

"The absolute main criteria for me doing a guitar with Fender is that anyone can go into the shop and come out with one that's exactly the same as the guitar I play. That had to be the case." >

© Marc McGarraghy

Marr in celebratory form at Manchester's Albert Hall in 2015

MARR ON... NEW COLLABORATIONS

"I'd absolutely make a record with Iggy Pop, because he's still great. There was talk of us working together in the late 80s, but it couldn't be done. He's one of the great lyricists and also one of the great thinkers, which is often overlooked.

"When I was a kid, I had no idea that Iggy as a presence would cross my path so many times. That's why I've got his quote on the back of my book. Iggy has been a constant throughout my life, from discovering *Raw Power* – which I always say is my favourite record – to the present day.

"It's interesting how Iggy crops up here and there throughout the book, from the writing of *Hand In Glove* to matchmaking me and Matt Johnson when I joined The The. He's always knocking around. Conversely, I've known John Squire since I was 15 and we've often jammed together, but it's never occurred to us to make a record. John takes his time, it's fair to say. I've never imagined what we could do together. I could imagine doing something with Ian Brown, because of the people who we both are. John believes in his group, and he's just happy they're back together again. I doubt us working together has ever occurred to John either."

Marr writes in the book about his belief that certain guitars have music already stored in them. In 2000, his beloved Gibson SG was stolen from the stage at London Scala after a gig with the indie band Haven. It was returned to him 10 years later by a fan who was a policeman and took it upon himself to track the guitar down.

We ask Marr whether any of the intangible musicality remained in the SG when he was reunited with it. "It absolutely did," he replies. "That's a good question. Amazingly, it felt exactly the same as when I'd left it, although the fucker had broken it and had it repaired. But, that aside, that guitar is such a tough little fucker it still felt the way it did when I last played it, regardless of the break. I guess that I got lucky that the prick who stole it off the stage wasn't a musician. But, now I think of it, it doesn't come as a surprise that such a prick would be a musician."

> "The most revealing aspect of writing the book was just how young I was, especially where The Smiths are concerned"

Returning to that oft-quoted fact about Marr's tender age when the band went their separate ways amid acrimonious circumstances, Marr says that when writing *Set The Boy Free*, he found himself stunned by the amount he achieved so young. Now 53, he says: "The most revealing aspect of writing the book was just how young I was when things happened. At the age I am now, it's striking looking back how young I was, especially where The Smiths are concerned. And my teenage years – I did a lot even before The Smiths."

That it's taken so long for Marr to commit his memories to paper is understandable when we recall that he's always described himself as being 'anti-nostalgia'.

"Doing the book was now or never," he admits. "I made a pact with myself when I was younger that I was never going to be about nostalgia or reflection. Which is a drawback when you're writing your autobiography! But the book has an energy, and it doesn't feel too reflective. That's one reason for the title – *Set The Boy Free* has that feeling of wanting to bust free and get more out of life. Plus, it sounds like the title for a great pop song that I haven't heard yet..."

Fittingly for a man who's famed for being so musically prolific, Marr wrote the book in just nine months, choosing not to enlist a ghost author – partly as a challenge to improve his own writing. "Doing my autobiography with someone else seemed like a contradiction in terms," he explains. "I don't have a problem with ghost writers. But the application, the accuracy, my style and

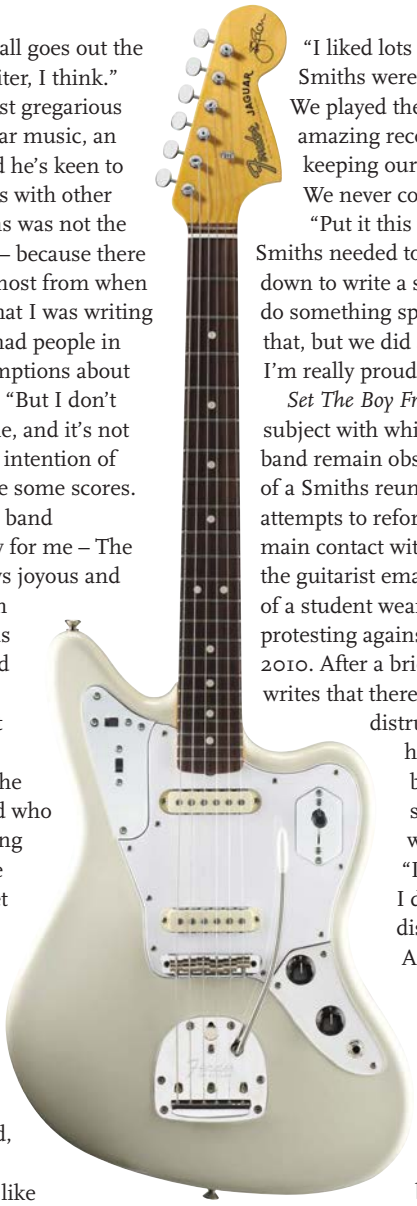
actually writing it? That all goes out the window with a ghost writer, I think."

Marr is one of the most gregarious and open figures in guitar music, an interviewer's dream, and he's keen to assert that settling scores with other memebers of The Smiths was not the motivation for the book – because there were none to settle. "Almost from when it was first announced that I was writing my autobiography, I've had people in the media making assumptions about settling scores," he says. "But I don't feel I have scores to settle, and it's not my style anyway. I've no intention of rewriting history to settle some scores.

"The fact is, when the band were together – certainly for me – The Smiths was nearly always joyous and an amazing trip. You can hear that in the music, as you can when drama and neurosis came into it. That was all part of what we were.

"Anyone who was in the band or around the band who denies that joy is rewriting history, because we were always walking three feet off the ground when we were doing things. I'm glad that I'm able to put that love back into the band, because things have got out of balance. The Smiths have been short-changed, especially by past books by supposed authorities like Johnny Rogan. But that happiness is the truth."

"I did know I was in the best band in the world, yeah," Marr laughs when we suggest to him that The Smiths were beyond compare.



"I liked lots of other bands, but The Smiths were above and beyond anyone. We played the best gigs and put out amazing records, and I felt like we were keeping our wheels going all the time. We never coasted.

"Put it this way – I never thought The Smiths needed to be better. Every time I sat down to write a song, I was really trying to do something special. You can't always do that, but we did a pretty good job of it. And I'm really proud of that."

Set The Boy Free details the one subject with which many fans of the band remain obsessed – the possibility of a Smiths reunion. After the aborted attempts to reform in 2008, Marr's main contact with Morrissey was when the guitarist emailed the singer a photo of a student wearing a Smiths T-shirt protesting against rising tuition fees in 2010. After a brief email exchange, Marr writes that there was "disaffection and distrust" lingering between him and Morrissey. But he believes their friendship can still be resumed. "Yeah, it will be resolved," he reflects. "I think it's all fine. I don't have any distrust or disaffection for Morrissey. And if it ever appears to be that way in public, that's just posturing. I can only speak for myself by saying that.

"When I was writing about our relationship in the book, I didn't overthink it. Anyone who needs to know how I think about things gets the reality of it from reading the book. It's obvious how I am about me and Morrissey: I'm pretty open-minded, I'm pretty laid back and I don't >

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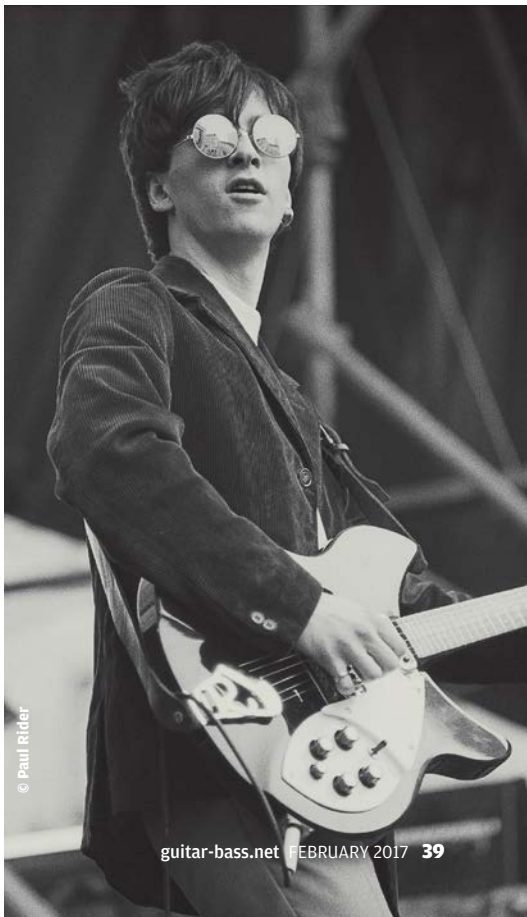


© Paul Rider

On stage with The Smiths in 1984

© Getty Images

give a fuck what other people outside of The Smiths think."

Shortly after the split, Marr met Paul McCartney, perhaps hoping for some sage words of wisdom about the band's demise. The proffered advice was simple: "That's bands for you". It's a phrase that's stuck with Marr. "Paul McCartney is more than qualified to have come up with that little four-word phrase, and it does say a lot," he chuckles. "Because bands are invested with so much emotion, ambition and idealism – or they should be. When those things are compromised or split apart through fame, drugs, wealth, success or lack of success, it's an experience unique to everyone who goes through them.

"It's complicated, because often the dysfunction of a band's chemistry is what makes the music interesting. Some bands find an equilibrium with their chemistry – U2, for example – but sometimes the tensions and the story off-stage are what make the chemistry interesting. It's unlike anything else in art. You don't paint a canvas with four other people and you don't get on a bus together to promote it either."

Marr's wife, Angie, believes his best guitar playing came during sessions with Bert Jansch, but Marr reveals that no recordings exist. "I'm really alright with that, as I can remember what we were playing," he says. "I wrote an instrumental song, *A To Z*, which Bert helped me out on, which was a really interesting, acoustic expedition. I've always been able to remember it, which is nice with him not being around now. I recorded a couple of things on his album *Crimson Moon*, which were nice, but the music I talk about in the book was jamming intensely on these really out-there improvisations, which covered psych and folk to getting pretty jazzy. It was very psychedelic. Bert was a very psychedelic person, and those recordings don't exist. Yeah, that was the best guitar playing I've ever done. Angie says so, and she should know."

After writing about his teenage years and meeting Angie, the next part of *Set The Boy Free* that Marr penned covers tales of hanging out with Bernard Sumner in Electronic "because they were the most fun". Their three albums spanned the 90s, but Marr says he knew it was all over when the duo began making final album *Twisted Tenderness*. "As Bernard's friend, I could see New Order needed to resume," he says. "I needed to do something else and get back to touring, which Electronic didn't really do. But *Twisted Tenderness* benefitted from being made very, very quickly. There are a few songs – *Haze*, *Vivid* and *Late At Night* – which profit from the sense of a last hurrah."

Marr also speaks fondly of his time with Portland, Oregon indie stars Modest Mouse, recalling: "The most artistic situation I've ever been in. Modest Mouse was a creative artistic endeavour – you've only got to look at their sleeves and videos to see that."

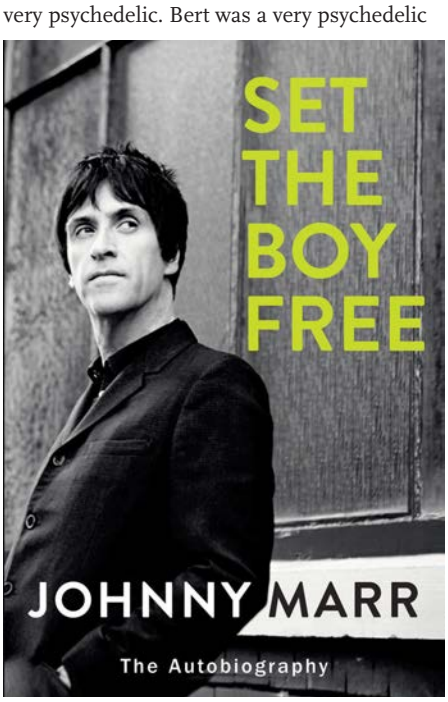
Focusing on his next solo album, Marr talks excitedly of "jumping off somewhere else", having viewed his first two records as a thematic pair, and he believes he has "a couple more books in me". Johnny Marr, it's clear, loves a challenge. He gave up meat when Morrissey decided The Smiths' second album should be called *Meat Is Murder*. He gave up drinking in 2003. He now runs 10 miles a day. "When I was 12, I took on smoking cigs and looking like Johnny Thunders with great gusto, and I ended up quitting them in the same fashion 30 years later," he says. "I'm all or nothing, and happy to be that way. It's too late to change. You know how you are by now, or you should. I was full-on when I quit smoking, but I was also that way when I discovered acid. I take things to the limit."

> "I don't have any distrust or disaffection for Morrissey. And if it ever appears to be that way in public, that's just posturing"

Ever the keen collaborator, Marr retains hopes of working again with The The leader Matt Johnson, who he has known since they were teenagers. Since Marr played on *Dusk* in 1993, the only new The The album has been 2000's *NakedSelf*. "I'm on at Matt all the time to make a new record," Marr laughs. "I saw Matt a couple of weeks ago, and he played me two new The The songs. They were really great, but I couldn't hear myself being able to play on them. The songs didn't need me. But I'm sure Matt and I will work on something again one day."

What's kept Marr moving through all of his musical adventures is restlessness: "I always deep down have a sense of being my own entity," he says. "I think that took a long time for the outside world to find out. Guitarists aren't supposed to be my way."

Johnny Marr's autobiography *Set The Boy Free* is out now, published by Century.



Marr on the opening night of his solo tour in Oxford in 2013

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10 TOP TIPS

Tommy Emmanuel

Virtuoso fingerstyle guitarist Tommy Emmanuel has been playing professionally since the age of six and is one of only five people to have been awarded Chet Atkins' Certified Guitar Player accolade. Here, he shares his tips for becoming a better player

Interview **Gary Walker**

1 Choose the right guitar

"If you're just starting out, you don't need an expensive guitar. You should start with a practical instrument, something not too cheap, but definitely not expensive. I recommend Yamaha, Ibanez, Maton or the cheaper range of Martins. Epiphone are good, too.

"If you are already playing and want to play open mics or guitar clubs or bars, you will need a guitar with a decent pickup so you can be heard. You'll need to try various guitars to see which one sounds best. The best pickup, in my opinion, for just plugging in and playing is a Maton, as it's the most user-friendly and the most real and usable sound from an electronic pickup that is out there. You'll have to experiment to find what your needs are. Some people like the sound of a magnetic pickup in the soundhole. Some of us like an under-saddle piezo-style pickup. Some like the stick-on sensor sound."

2 Get your guitar set up properly

"Most parents who are buying their kids their first guitar don't know that the guitar, as it is in the shop, is set up with a high action. All guitars can be set up so they are comfortable to play and don't strain your hands after long periods of playing.

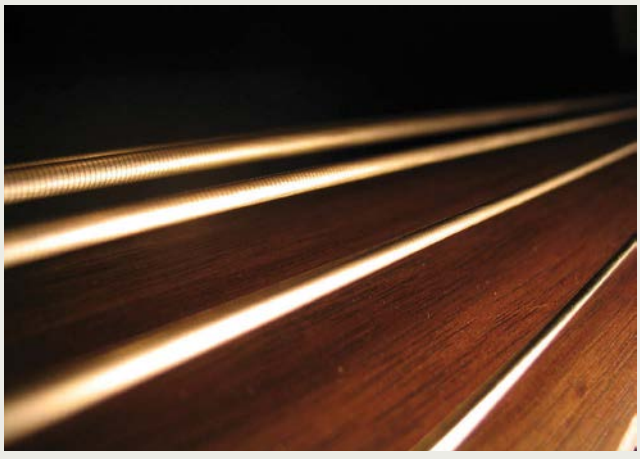
"If the store doesn't have an in-house luthier, set up and repair section, then you need to find a place that can make the changes you need to make the guitar more playable. The action should be not too low, with the strings buzzing on the frets, and not too high so that you struggle to get any clarity when playing barre chords. Make sure that you have your preferred strings on while the guitar is being adjusted, because thicker strings can have a lower action."

Simone Cecchetti

3 Tune up!

"Firstly, learn how to tune a guitar without a tuner, then get yourself a tuner and get familiar with using it. The more time you spend tuning, the more your ear will get used to the sound of being in tune or out of tune. As you get to know your guitar more thoroughly, you'll find its imperfections and be able to tune accordingly so you are in tune all the way up the neck.

"I also recommend you try various brands of strings and find which one tunes up the best with your guitar. I use several tuners – one backstage, one on stage (which mutes) and one as a clip-on for referencing between songs."



4 Learn good songs

"I recommend starting out with simple songs that have a simple chord structure but still have good melody over the top. Learning songs that you like will keep you interested and motivated. When you're working on a new song, you don't need to be doing anything else but this new song. Work it out and practise it bar by bar until you can play it all the way through without mistakes. This may take some time. Once you can do that, then make sure that every time you pick up your guitar you play through this new song and keep it in your memory. A good idea is to record yourself and listen back to how you are playing the song. Make sure you listen for any parts that are not smooth or in time. This will help you iron out any of the bumps in the arrangement and make it flow."

> "When you're working on a new song, you don't need to be doing anything else but this new song"

5 Know your limitations

"It's better to be able to play something simple with good feeling and good time than to struggle your way through something that is very difficult to play. At whatever stage you're at in your playing abilities, you should know your limitations and work within them.

"In order for you to surpass where you're at now, you need to put in a lot of work – and that takes time and a lot of dedication. So if you have a chance to play in front of an audience, make sure you play the songs that you are confident you can play well. Nobody wants to watch someone struggling with their instrument. We want to hear nice music played with feeling."

6 Don't be afraid of emulating

"I think it's nature's way that we all start out emulating someone. We see and hear an artist that inspires us and lights a fire in us, and we want to be like them and to play their music because it's exciting. We learn as many of their songs in their style as we can, and we enjoy playing these for other people. But, eventually, we start to find our own voice, our own style, our own way of playing. This usually happens when we start composing and performing our own songs.

"Music is like a language. We learn other people's songs so we can jam with others who have learned the same songs, and it gives us an opportunity to interact and play together, having something in common to say. This is when we start learning new ways from each other and exchanging ideas through the language of music."

7 Use a metronome

"Playing with a metronome is very important. When I first used the metronome, it was my enemy. I hated it and it kept slowing down. Actually, it showed me all the faults in my sense of timing. Once I got used to playing with this mechanical beast, it set >

Simone Cecchetti

me free and I felt liberated and relaxed with my playing.

"Some songs really work played with a metronome and others don't. You'll need to experiment and find which ones work for you."

8 We need to be inspired

"You cannot manufacture inspiration, it has to show up through many sources. For us to be truly creative, we need to be in a physical and mental state of excitement and readiness to experiment. Sometimes, we may be emotionally moved by a film or a song we've heard, and when we are feeling these emotions that's usually when ideas come to us – especially if we have our instrument in our hands. I, personally, have written many songs through being moved by a film that touched me deeply, and I know that because I was in that state I just let my feelings flow through the guitar.

"It helped me to stay in the moment with this new idea and use all my songwriting abilities to finish the piece and stay focused. It needs to be a priority to get

"Sometimes you need to listen to something different. It can take you outside your comfort zone"

inspired... sometimes you need to listen to something completely different from what you normally listen to and it can take you outside your comfort zone. You also need to keep your mind open to all kinds of influences around you. This will help you to stay spontaneous when ideas flow."

9 We need experience

"In order for us to become better musicians and play with more confidence, we truly need to have the experiences of playing in front of people in different situations as often as possible. Having a completely open attitude about music and being willing to try to learn new things will help us in the long run to be more skilled and mature as musicians.

"The experience of playing in front of people in the moment demands a lot more of you mentally and physically than just sitting at home playing for yourself. So you need that exposure as often as you can to raise the level of your playing and performing. When we play in front of people, we tend to dig in more because we're trying to play with more power, feeling and clarity, and we are in a state of full concentration. We don't always play this way in our bedroom.

"On a different topic, make your arrangements interesting! When you find a song you want to play, stay true to the melody then focus on the following:

a) Find the right key to play the song in, looking for ways of getting as many open notes into the melody as possible so it has a beautiful flow to it.

b) If the song has a repetitive melody, then find alternative chords so they surprise the listener at every chance.

c) Keep an ear open for all the ways in which a key change can be utilised and try to make them as unpredictable as possible.

d) A good arrangement doesn't mean that you have to fill up every bar with lots of notes; sometimes a good arrangement has lots of space and allows the listener to use their imagination more."

10 Practise a lot

"When I was a kid starting out, I didn't want to practise. I wanted to go outside and play with my friends. My parents told me that if I didn't practise, I wouldn't get any good at the instrument. I didn't care at the time because, somehow, I could always play the songs that I loved and get through the show. It wasn't until I was about 14 that I tried to work out songs that were seemingly impossible, and I actually worked some out, and it was a revelation to me. I realised if I put the work in and didn't give up, I could work out anything.

"I discovered the joy of working hard and hearing the results of my dedication. I love practice now, and it's an important part of our lives as musicians. We need to practise alone as well as with others we are working with. Some people approach it in a militant style, where they have a routine and they stick to it. I have never

been like that... I usually learn a new song and only practise that new song until I've got it down. Then I move on to the next song.

"Larry Carlton wrote on a guitar once, 'Practise what you must, but play what you love'. These are wise words. There are days when I know I must practise my motor skills, so I spend all my time playing things that work all my muscles and help me build up strength. Then there are times when I just play songs one after the other to enjoy the feeling of flowing with the music. All of the best players I've been around have been very dedicated to practising. When I got to know Chet Atkins, I realised how much he practised and how dedicated he was. It inspired me and challenged me to work harder."

THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"Being in this world is simultaneously happy and sad, good and bad. You can't have one without the other"

Hailed widely as one of the best albums of 2016, *Heart Like A Levee* saw Hiss Golden Messenger receive the critical acclaim that bandleader MC Taylor's years of musical toil richly deserved. He tells *G&B* about the journey, his love of Martin guitars and why the musical heritage of the South is so vital to his music

Story **Gary Walker**

It's been a long journey for MC Taylor and his band, aka Hiss Golden Messenger. A journey that shows sometimes you have to slow down in order to reach your destination. And for Taylor that destination, at the end of a winding road pocked with the pitfalls of fickle fortune, came in the shape of many pundits' record of 2016, the outstanding *Heart Like A Levee*.

After spending more than a decade playing in West Coast hardcore band Ex-Ignota and alt-country act Court & Spark with musical life-partner Scott Hirsch, before briefly working as a PE teacher, it appeared that the fleeting beam of musical success would forever refuse to shine upon Taylor. So the Orange County, Los Angeles native packed up and moved east to North Carolina in 2009.

It was there, settled in with his wife and children for a more pastoral existence among the old tobacco mills of the Tar Heel state, and studying post-graduate folklore at the University of North Carolina, that Hiss Golden Messenger blossomed. Having accepted that his musical career had stalled before take-off, success sought out MC Taylor.

> "Vernacular music of the South is very important to me. It speaks to me with more consistency than almost any other kind"

After returning home from lengthy live commitments for 2014's *Lateness Of Dancers*, *Heart Like A Levee* finds Taylor, an accomplished and versatile guitarist who began playing in his early teens, wrestling with the dichotomy of being a 40-something, sometimes-absent father and a touring musician. Its writing began in a Washington DC hotel room in January 2015, snow flakes dancing against the window as a powerful storm raged at America's East Coast. It documents a time when Taylor had quit his day job to have one last stab at making his defining album and showing his children their dad is deserving of a place alongside the musical greats who look down from the covers of the classic albums on the shelves in their house. Ironically, his career was about to hit its high-water mark, just as Taylor was most settled into family life.

"I think things happened when they were supposed to happen," he reflects. "It took me a while to find myself, I guess. I'm just grateful for it all. I try my hardest every day to keep my head down and let art lead the way and have fun. I make a living doing the thing that I love most in the world and I have to pay >

attention to my relationship to that thing, to really treat it with care. And my kids get to see their dad do something that he is obsessed with every day. Not every kid gets to see that. I didn't, really. So that's important to me."

Rewind to 2010 and, with his newly born son Elijah slumbering upstairs, Taylor went into his kitchen, placed a cassette recorder on the table, picked up one of his favoured Martins and recorded the album that first alerted the world to his considerable talents and encyclopedic knowledge of American guitar music. *Bad Debt* was born in the thick of a Southern winter, its tender reflections on the intricacies and contradictions of faith woven gently in the quiet of a Piedmont night; and it sparked a creatively fertile period in which he would release six albums in as many years.

However, ill fortune was to make one further intervention on Taylor's journey. Originally released on the UK label Blackmaps, most of the copies of *Bad Debt* were destroyed in a warehouse fire caused by the riots in London in 2010, meaning it never reached the audience it deserved. The album was eventually re-released in 2014.

The evolution of the Hiss Golden Messenger sound continued through 2011's *Poor Moon*, by now with a fleshed-out full-band sound. 2013's *Haw* (named after the river that rises in Piedmont country in the north of the state) showcased more ambitious arrangements still. The sweeping strings on *Sufferer (Love My Conqueror)*, wanton Neil Young-like lead playing on *Red Rose Nantahala*, the warming tribute *Sweet As John Hurt* and the gospel feel of *Busted Note* are again shot through with ruminations on the complexities of spirituality.

> "I have no interest in approaching music academically. I do the things most likely to give me goosebumps"

The 2014 breakthrough *Lateness Of Dancers* was a more breezy affair, with guitarist William Tyler, Phil and Brad Cook from North Carolina psych-folk band Megafaun and Alexandra Sauser-Monnig of Appalachian folk act Mountain Man joining a *Highway 61 Revisited*-era Dylan-style cast of local musicians surrounding Taylor and Hirsch.

It's hard not to perceive Taylor's move to North Carolina as a lightning-bolt moment. It's a state with an incredibly rich musical heritage – Nina Simone, John Coltrane, Blind Boy Fuller, Emmylou Harris, Ben E King, Doc Watson, George Clinton, Earl Scruggs, Thelonious Monk, Ryan Adams and Tori Amos are just a few of the musicians born there, and Taylor holds his adopted home close to his Californian heart.

"I moved to North Carolina to be closer to the source of the things that I love the most in the United States, so it was an important move," he says. "The South is a beautiful and complicated place with many shades of emotion, and I am so happy to live there. It continues to teach me a lot. Vernacular music of the South – gospel, blues, country, bluegrass, old-time, jazz... is very important

to me. It's the kind of music that speaks to me and engages me with more consistency than almost any other kind. And I've spent a lifetime learning to take what I love about those kinds of music and re-contextualise it in my own music in a way that feels genuine and hopeful and real.

"I have no interest in approaching music academically. I do the things that are most likely to give me goosebumps, that's about the best compass I have. It just so happens that the language I have at my disposal is often the musical language that comes from around the area that I live. I'm lucky in that way to live so close to what I consider the fountain of knowledge. And, importantly, so much of the music from the South that I love holds both the light and the dark in its hands at the same time."

That concept of light and dark is a central theme on *Heart Like A Levee*. Its opening track pays more than a passing nod to Dylan's *Tangled Up In Blue*, before the album unfolds into a true connoisseur's scrapbook of American musical history, its dusty pages unfurling to reveal folk, soul, rhythm and blues, funk and gospel compositions of rare quality. Indeed, the most relevant comparison to Dylan lies in the similarly stunning and incisive writing on display.

On the rousing title track, Taylor sings of a "Cincinnati moon, like a wheel in the sky", before musing, "Standing in the wake with the sky still changing. What's it going to take to keep you missing the rambling rake with a heart of obsidian? Standing in the wake with the sky still changing." There's uncertainty and soul-searching throughout, as Taylor throws question after question at the listener – and a loved one: "Will you grieve me, honey? Did I give you a reason to try?".

We ask if being a father, shielding his offspring from the dangers of an increasingly uncertain world, following a year of spiralling existential fear, inspired the album? "Those are my feelings of the world in general, regardless of the year," he replies. "Wendell Berry said something like, 'To know the dark, you have to know the light'. There's no night without day, you know? And it feels important to keep reminding myself of that, that the act of being in this world is simultaneously happy and sad, good and bad. You can't have one without the other. I find myself less interested in art that is one-note. I find that I tire of it quickly."

Unforgettable sound

The tone of Martin acoustic guitars runs richly through *Heart Like A Levee*, and the Pennsylvania brand acted as the catalyst that started Taylor's musical journey.

"The first guitar that I connected to in my life – not even as a player, but just as an object that was loaded with emotion – was my dad's 1964 Martin D-28," he remembers. "It still stands as the most beautiful-sounding guitar that I know, though I realise that is in large part for personal reasons. During my whole childhood, he would play that guitar and sing, and it was so soothing to me. It still is, he has a beautiful voice – very different from mine, very pure and clear.

"I bought my first guitar when I was about 13. It was a Takamine Jasmine, and it collected dust for about four years, until I decided that I wanted to actually learn to play. I learned a few chords from my dad and then just kind of picked stuff up along the way.

"I generally play Martin 000 acoustic guitars because I've always liked the way those smaller bodies project sound, and I find that sometimes a bigger body, like a dreadnought, just seems to eat up the note articulation and the detail gets lost. At least the way I play. So smaller guitars seem to work better for me."

That crisp acoustic tone is in full effect on the achingly beautiful *Cracked Windshield* – one of the standout tracks on *Heart Like A Levee*. It has melodic shades of Van Morrison's *Slim Slow Slider*, with Taylor wistfully noting "I can feel October coming on the back-scratch wind". *Like A Mirror Loves A Hammer*, in contrast, breaks free of the album's sense of bucolic serenity, as a filthy fuzzed-up tremolo delivered via Taylor's Silvertone 1448 and a Strymon Flint duels with a rasping saxophone over a devilish funk groove. It serves as a reminder of Taylor's deep love and understanding of American musical genres through the ages. His home plays >

Taylor (right) on stage at Brixton Academy with (l-r) Phil Cook, Cameron Ralston and Kyle Keegan

host to a vast vinyl collection, and throughout *Heart Like A Levee* his love of North American icons such as Dylan, Crosby Stills & Nash, Neil Young, Fleetwood Mac and Wilco resonates. We wonder which guitarists had the most profound effect on Taylor as he was growing up in California.

"There were a lot, I guess," he replies. "Not because of technique, necessarily, but more because of how the instrument was used on the recording. I love the way the acoustic guitars sound on the first CSN record, for instance – very compressed and tactile and funky. There were some guitarists that I really liked when I was young and playing punk-rock – obscure players, mostly, and I was responding to the attitude with which they played, mostly. Tonie Joy was a guy that played in a lot of bands that I liked at that time.

"I love the way the guitar is used on a record like *Music From Big Pink*, as sort of a colour instead of a lead instrument. Very ego-less. I'm not much interested in guitar solos, generally. I like players that foreground rhythm, like Curtis Mayfield. Everything he played feels right-on and in the pocket. Phil Upchurch is another one from that school. Jimmy Johnson of The Swampers. Dan Penn. There are a lot..." Those influences are evident throughout *Heart Like A Levee*, with Taylor's gently singing Martins and lilting slide riffs placed intelligently on the sonic canvas amid tastefully used strings, saxophone and banjo parts. The production is immaculate, and it's further evidence of Taylor's hard-earned musical maturity that he and Bradley Cook handled it themselves.

> "The first guitar I connected to was my dad's 1964 Martin D-28. It's still the most beautiful-sounding guitar I know"

"We had a few Martins for the acoustic stuff, some Telecasters, a guitar that Creston Lea in Vermont built for me, a Gallagher Dreadnought from the early 70s, a cheap old Silvertone," says Taylor, recalling the recording sessions in Durham, NC, with a band drawn from Taylor's vast web of contacts in the state's music scene.

"There were a lot of our instruments around, but none of them are stock. Phil Cook – who plays keys and guitar – and I are both always tinkering with our guitars, so everything has unusual pickups, etc.

"Our amps are the same. We have a guy that works on our amps in Durham, named Tim Ristau, and Phil and I have both gone really deep with him to create amps that sound the way we want to play.

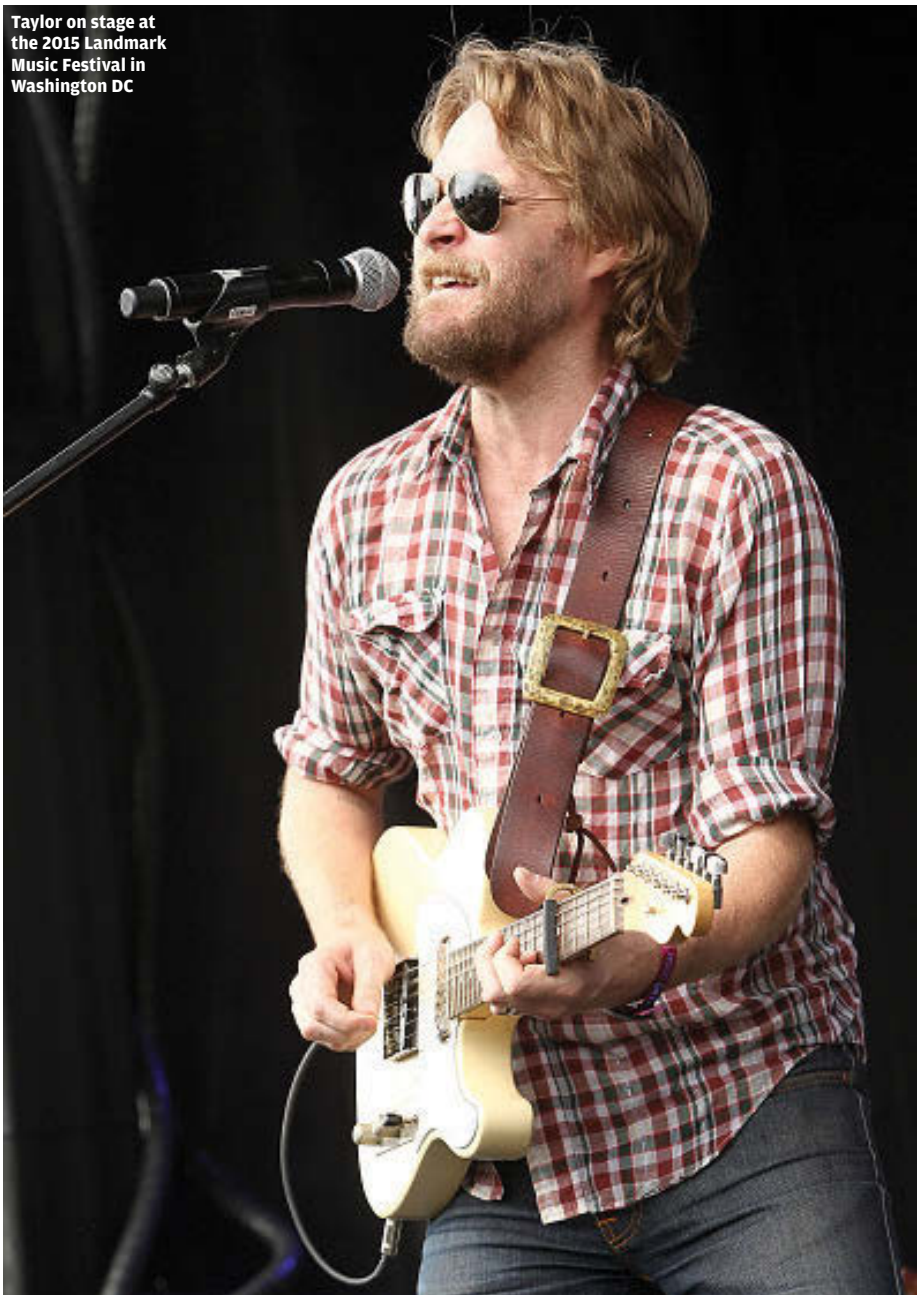
"In terms of pedals, Phil and I both have Strymon Flint pedals sort of at the core of our rigs, and we both have assorted pedals from Greer Amps in Athens. And then a variety of delays. I always keep a really nice phase on my board because I love what Waylon Jennings did with that effect, and I almost always have my trem pedal on. I'm a huge fan of Pops Staples. Come to think of it, he may be my favourite guitarist."

At the conclusion of this latest part of MC Taylor's musical journey, praise has been fulsome for *Heart Like A Levee* – from both critics and musical contemporaries. One of those contemporaries to publicly declare himself a fan is Taylor's friend Justin Vernon, aka Bon Iver, whose drummer Matt McCaughan plays on the record.

Taylor is about to begin a world tour that will see him criss-cross Europe before returning for an exhaustive victory lap of the US, so we ask whether there's a sense of vindication as such acclaim is lavished on his work – years after lesser artists would have submitted to the obstacles thrown in their path and given up. His response is typically level and considered – light and dark.

"I value the opinion of people that I consider good and kind and deep," he says, "and Justin is all of those things, so I am grateful to him for that.

"I've been making records and touring for the entirety of my adult life, and relatively few people cared until quite recently, so if I need validation I know where to look for it, and it's usually in myself, or from the small circle of people that I hold close."



Taylor on stage at the 2015 Landmark Music Festival in Washington DC

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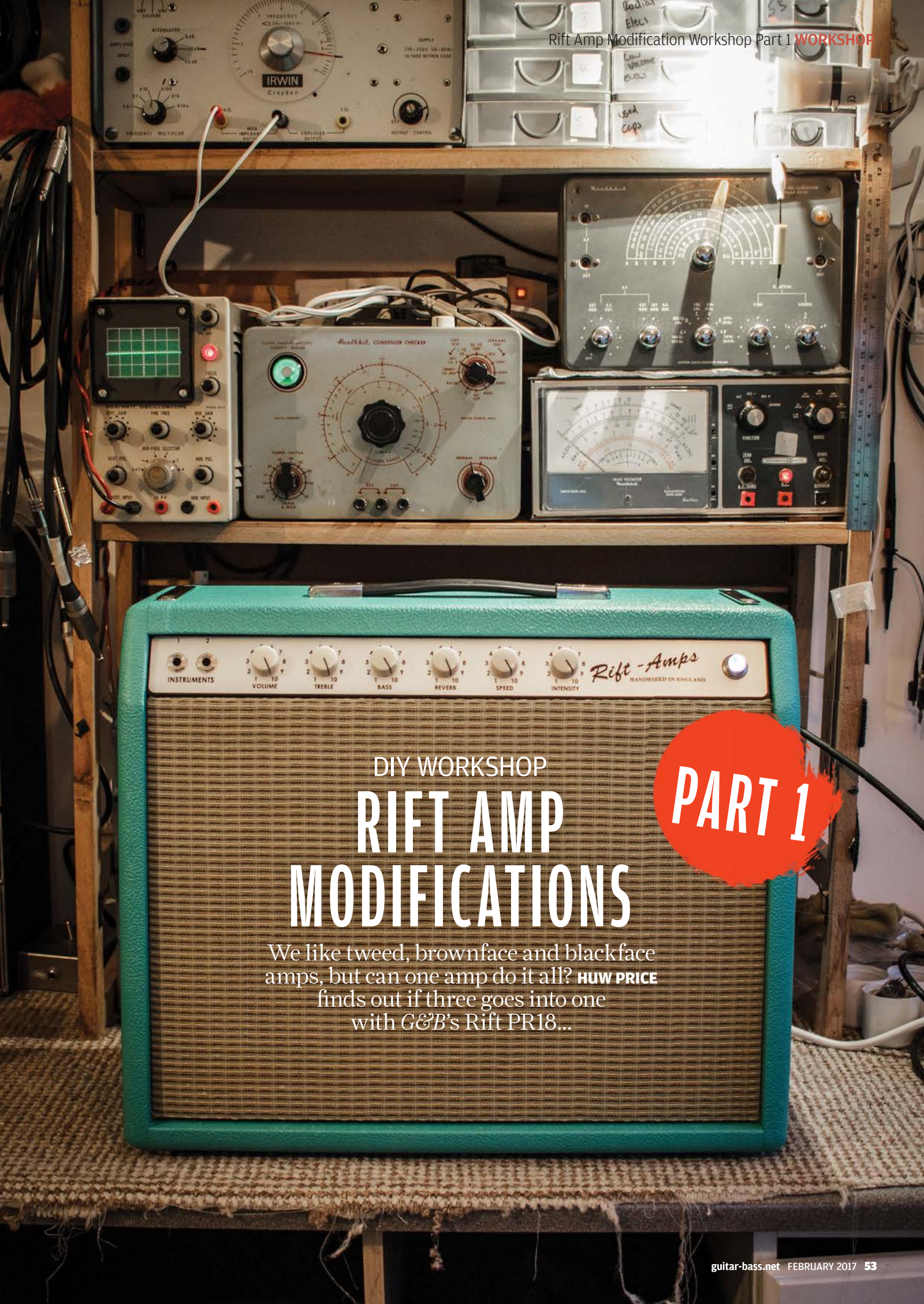
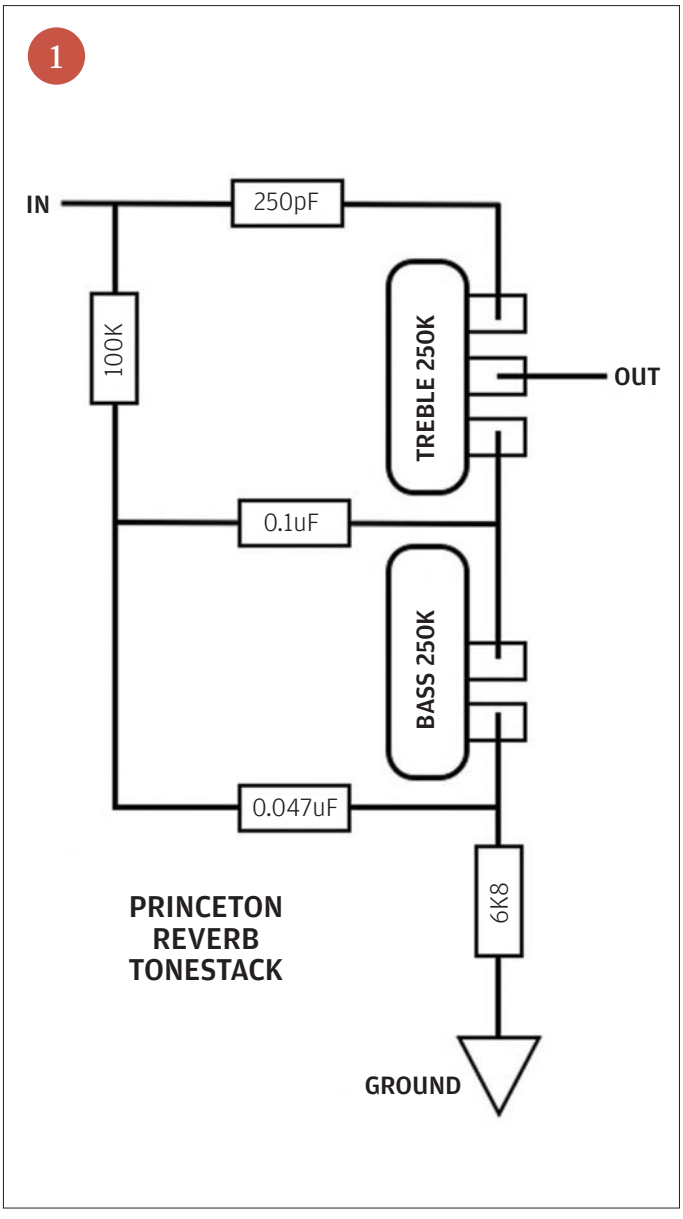


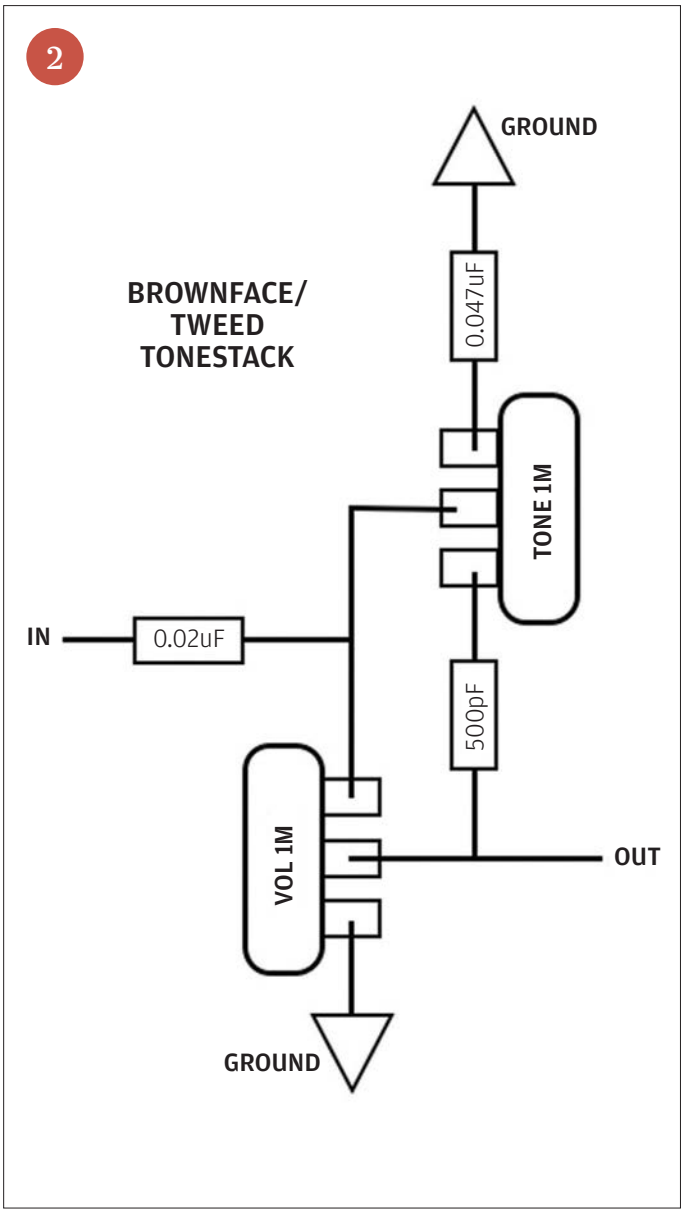
DIY WORKSHOP

RIFT AMP MODIFICATIONS

PART 1

We like tweed, brownface and blackface amps, but can one amp do it all? **HUW PRICE** finds out if three goes into one with *G&B*'s Rift PR18...





1 The Princeton Reverb tonestack is a carry over from the bigger late-50s tweeds and has a scooped midrange characteristic

2 The brownface Princeton tonestack equates to lower power tweeds and has a flatter response with lower signal loss

Although there are subcategories and weird transitional models, vintage Fender amp circuits are mostly divided into three varieties – namely tweed, brownface and blackface. Of course, there are the silverface and Rivera models that could also be regarded as classics in their own right but, for the purposes of this article, we'll be confining ourselves to the earlier types.

Some readers may recall our workshop feature detailing the electronic restoration and modification of a 1957 Fender Vibrolux (*G&B* October 2015). If you missed it, you can read a digital version on guitar-bass.net. The amplifier in question had a replacement output transformer from a Fender Princeton. Although a Triad #108 output transformer would have been fitted in 1957, by 1959 Fender was installing the Princeton-spec Schumacher 125A1A in the tweed Vibrolux. This continued into 1960.

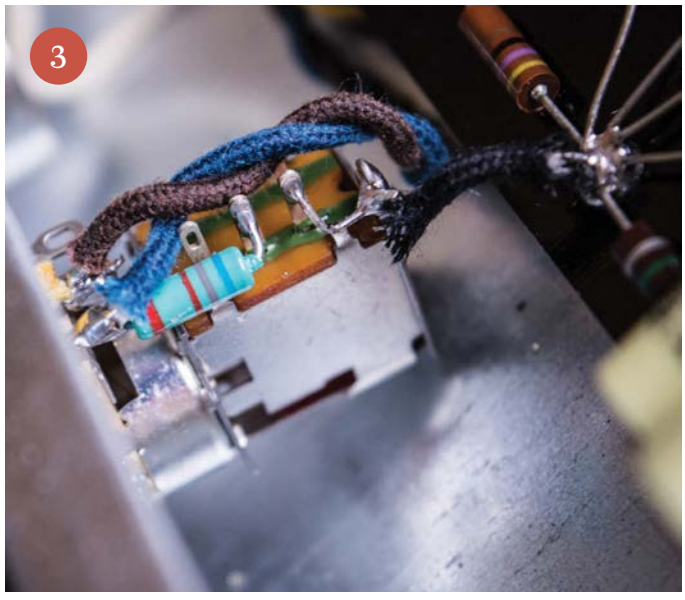
Upon closer examination I noticed that besides some voltage variations, a handful of components and the frankly odd input arrangement, the Vibrolux circuit was virtually identical to a brownface non-reverb Princeton. The restored Vibrolux ended up sounding incredible.

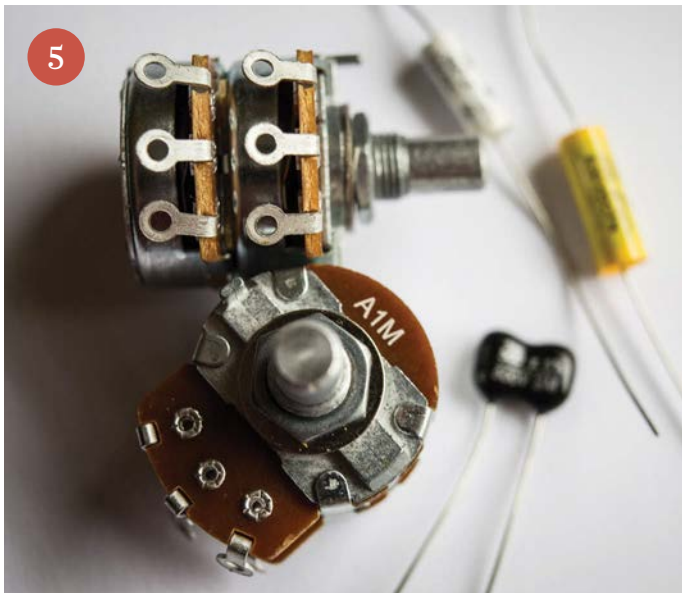
The Princeton Reverb has many similarities to the brownface Princeton and the Vibrolux; the most obvious difference is the addition of spring reverb. Less obvious are the extra valves and a redesigned tonestack with an entirely different tone.

The rub is that they are all pretty great-sounding amps that do various things very well indeed. In recent years, some boutique manufacturers have achieved great success by adding reverb and tremolo to classic tweed circuits that never had those effects – such as the 5E3 Deluxe.

It occurred to me that it might be possible to approach things from the opposite direction and see if there was a way to coax tweed and brownface tones from a Princeton Reverb-style amplifier. Of course, I needed a donor amp and we already had a rather wonderful PR18 that the editor and I built with considerable assistance from Chris Fantana of Rift Amplifiers.

Three considerations were paramount. Firstly, I wanted to retain the stock PR18 tone, because





it has become a firm favourite for clean atmospheric tones and edge of breakup blues with P-90s and semi-solids in general. Secondly, I didn't want to end up with a complex control layout and a plethora of fiddly switches. Thirdly, the reverb and tremolo effects had to remain available in each and every mode. In essence, this project is an experiment to see if three really can go into one.

Tonestack lightning

When I was younger, I thought that blackface and silverface Fenders produced clear and uncoloured guitar tone. I was right about the first point, but I eventually learned that the tonestacks Fender had designed for those amps were extremely coloured.

Previously, Fender had employed a single tone control, but for the blackface amps a new control layout was devised with bass and treble controls and an extra middle control on higher-spec models 1. There was obviously something about it that worked, because the same tonestack soon began showing up on Marshalls, Voxes and countless other amps, and is still widely used today.

In simple terms, Fender's tonestack takes the signal that's amplified by V1a, then applies attenuation across the entire frequency range by dumping the signal to ground. Turning up the tone controls doesn't actually boost the various frequency bands as such, because the system is passive not active. Instead, the effect is to place more resistance between the signal and ground in those frequency bands. In other words, you're reducing the amount of attenuation rather than applying a boost.

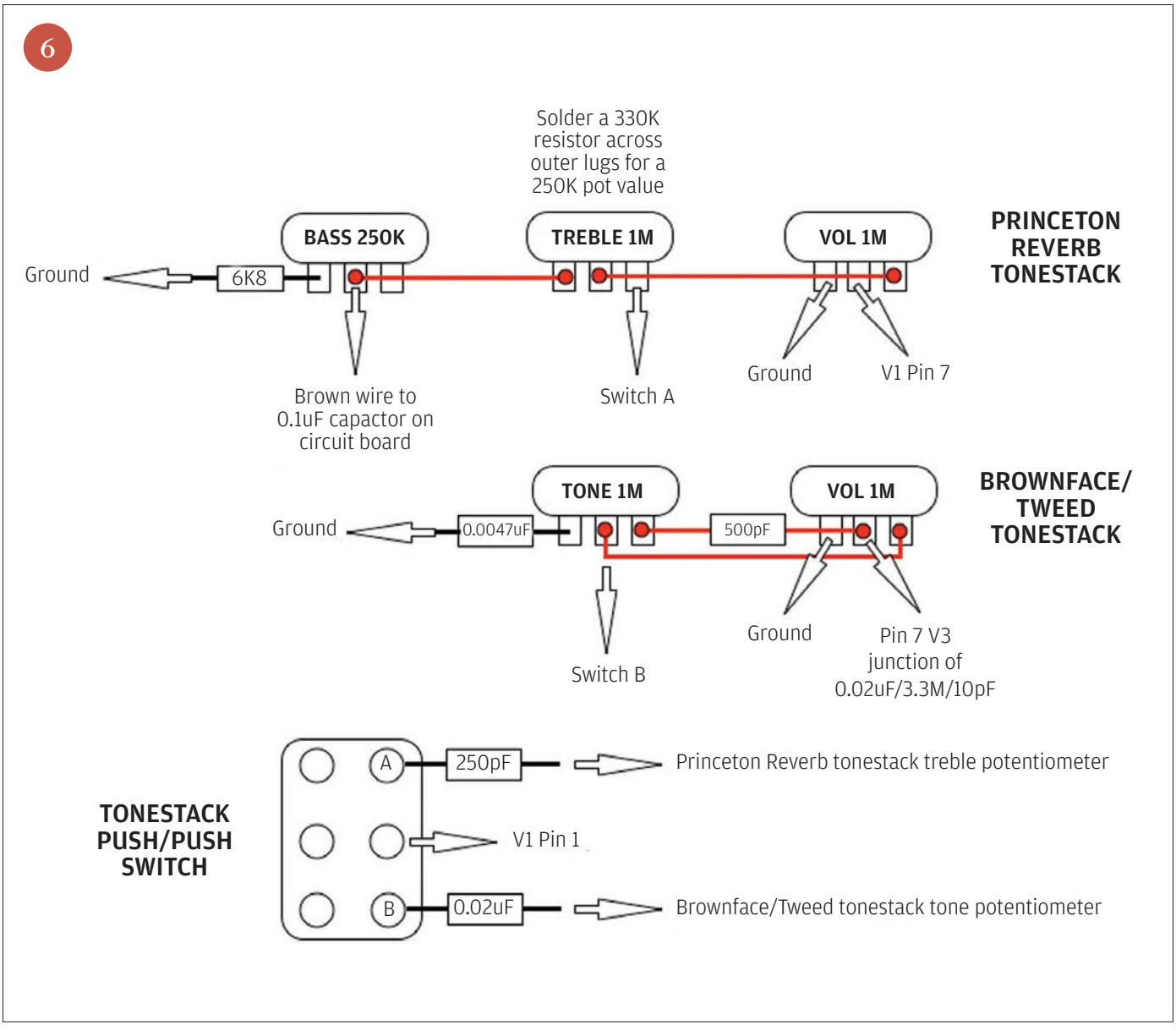
Actually, it's even more complicated than that, because all the controls interact and the treble control actually balances two different filters depending on its position. In fact, the Fender tonestack gets so complex and convoluted it would justify an article on its own, but we'll save that for another time.

The upshot is that the tonestack doesn't actually have a flat frequency response, even when treble, middle and bass are all set to 5. The default tone of this stack has a 'smiley face' curve where the midrange is considerably scooped. The Princeton Reverb's stack doesn't >

3 This switch was used on *G&B*'s Rift PR18 to disconnect the 6K8 resistor from ground and bypass the tonestack

4 With the 6K8 resistor soldered directly to the switch's ground tag, the push/push is freed up for tonestack switching

5 These 1M dual-gang pots are from Amp Maker. Each potentiometer acts independently of the other



6 The switch is actually integral to the bass potentiometer, but it appears separately here for clarity

even have a middle control and the scooped mids are preset by a 6K8 resistor running from the bass potentiometer to ground.

In part, this explains why Tube Screamer-type overdrives work so well with amps that have this type of tonestack – the mid bump of the overdrive fills in the mids, while the bass and treble roll-offs prevent the overdriven tones from getting too boomy and too shrill. In short, they 'neutralise' the tonestack.

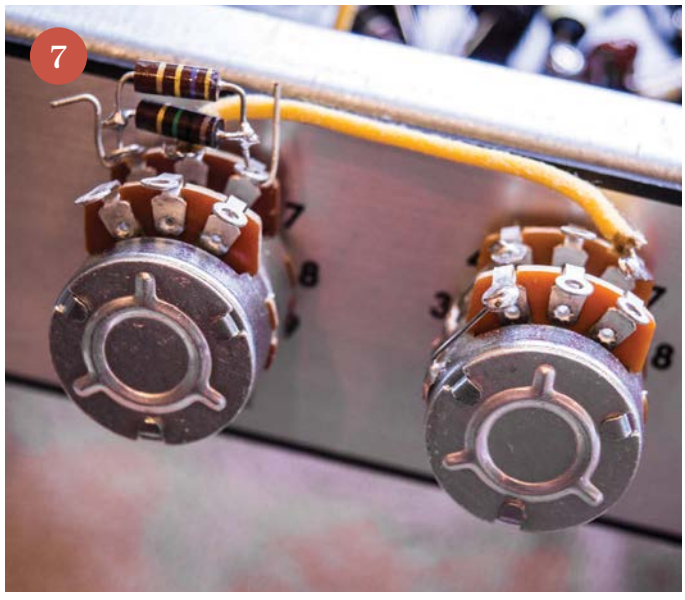
I used the phrase 'applies attenuation across the entire frequency range' a little earlier. What that means is that the tonestack lowers the entire guitar signal. So V1a bumps it up and the tonestack knocks it back down. Techie types describe it as being 'lossy' and it means that Fender had to install an extra amplification stage after the tonestack to restore the signal level.

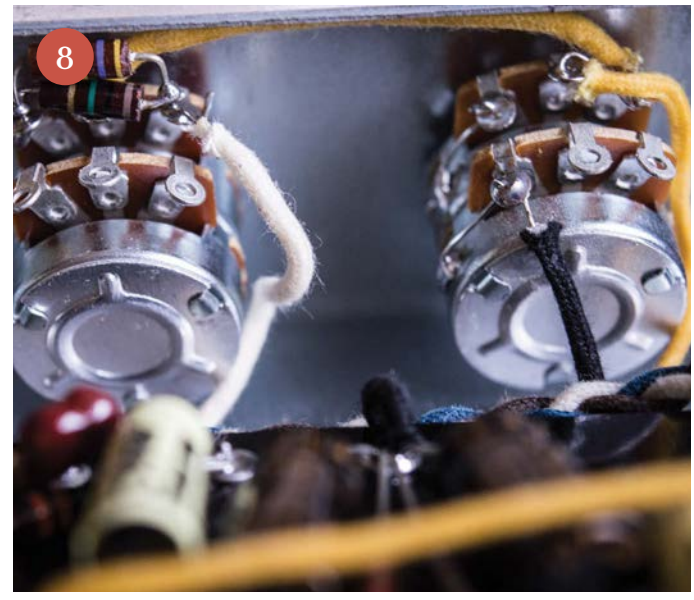
The Vibrolux and brownface tone circuits are identical and work as a simple treble bleed that sends high frequencies to ground via a 0.047uF capacitor. The tone control works in conjunction with a 500pF 'bright' capacitor wired across the volume potentiometer 2. Below a certain point, the tone control slices off treble; around midway, it's essentially neutral and then, above a certain point, more upper frequencies find their way through the bright cap – making the amp brighter and louder.

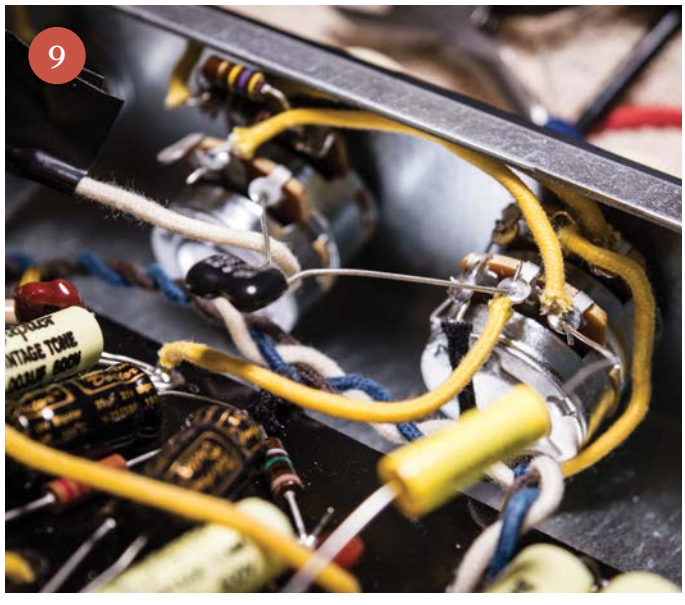
Maxing out the volume control takes the bright cap 'out of circuit' so tone interacts with volume. As well as being simpler than the Princeton Reverb stack, the tweed/brownface stack isn't lossy, so there's no need for an extra amplification stage and there's no inherent mid scoop. The upshot is that the tweed/brownface circuits sound louder, fatter and throatier. Kept clean, it also allows you to hear a truer representation of your guitar tone.

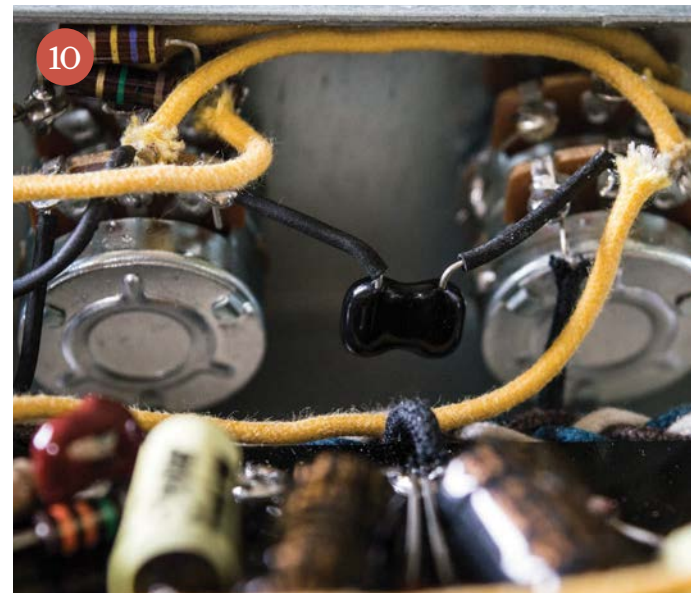
Switching stacks

Chris Fantana was never particularly keen on our original suggestion for a tonestack bypass switch and neither the editor nor myself have found much use for it. By disconnecting the 6K8 resistor from ground, you do get a big increase in midrange and gain, but the effect sounds quite harsh and crude 3. So I decided to hardwire the 6K8 to ground and free up the push/push on the bass control for stack switching 4.









Although 1M volume pots are used in all three amp circuits, the Princeton Reverb has a 250K treble potentiometer rather than a 1M tone pot. Dual-gang 1M controls seemed like the way to go and I sourced a couple from Amp Maker (ampmaker.com) in the UK 5. Soldering a 330K resistor across the outer lugs of a 1M potentiometer turns it into a 250K potentiometer – or 248K, which is close enough 6.

After making careful notes of the stock wiring, I lifted the connections from the volume and tone controls and removed them from the chassis. I placed the new dual-gang pots through the vacant holes from the outside of the chassis to hold them in position while I soldered the interconnecting wires and the ground connections 7. The pots were then mounted inside the chassis and I hooked everything back up as before, to establish that the Princeton Reverb stack was still functioning properly 8.

The next stage was to install the 0.047uF and 500pF capacitors and connect up the tweed/brownface stack for testing. To do this, I had to remove the 250pF capacitor from the main board and solder a jumper wire in its place. A 0.02uF coupling capacitor was soldered onto the end of the white wire that previously served as the input to the Princeton Reverb stack and the other end of the capacitor was soldered to the tweed/brownface volume control.

For this stack to function properly, I had to skip the make-up gain stage entirely and solder the volume pot output directly to pin 7 of V3. Again, it worked exactly as I had hoped, with a noticeable midrange lift and a slight volume boost 9.

Having established that both tonestacks were okay, it was time to tidy up the tonestack wiring and try and make them switchable. The switch was a double-gang double throw, which meant I could switch the inputs and outputs simultaneously and completely disconnect the unused tonestack from the circuit 10 & 11.

Reverb relocation

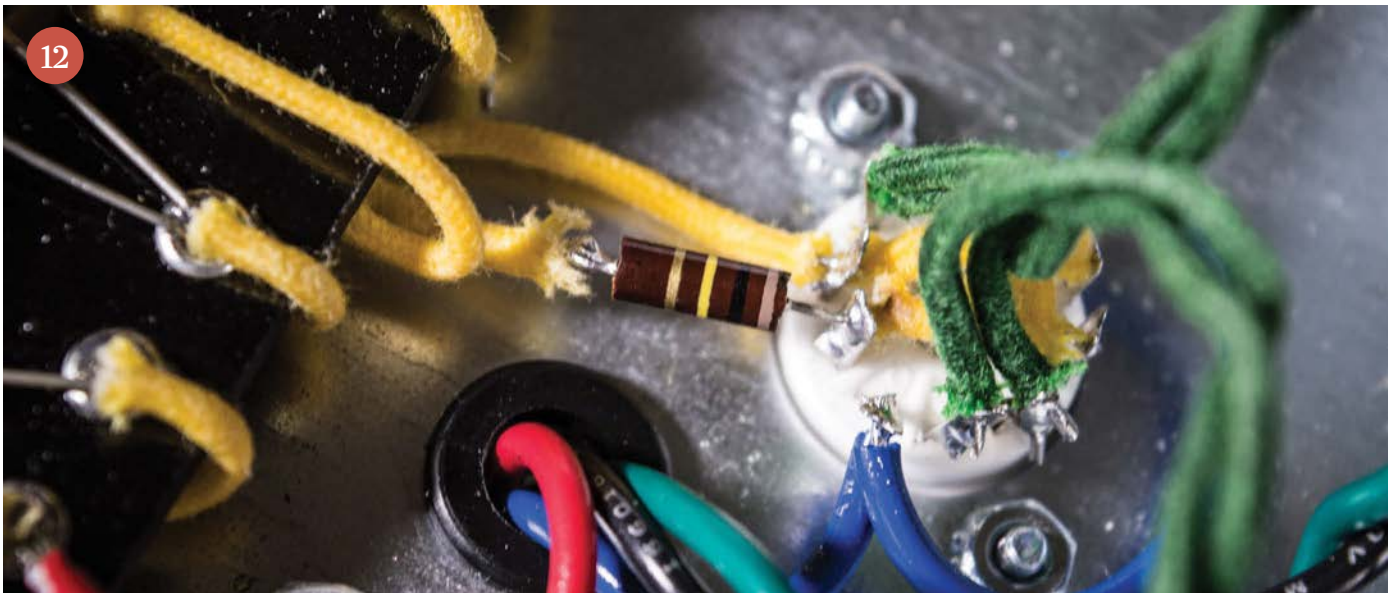
Those readers who are familiar with the Princeton Reverb circuit will already have realised that there is no way the stock reverb circuit can work with the tweed/brownface stack engaged. This is because the reverb send comes >

7 We had no 330K resistors in stock, so we paralleled 470K and 1M resistors to change the 1M potentiometer value to 242K

8 Here, the blackface tonestack connections are made and tested

9 The brownface tonestack tests good, meaning it's time to tidy the wiring and implement the switch

10 Both tonestacks are wired up and the 500pF capacitor has heatshrink applied to its leadout wires



11 The white wire comes from pin 1 of V1 and the 250pF and 0.02uF capacitors lead to the blackface and brownface stacks respectively

12 A 100K resistor was used to tame the level of the reverb send before reaching the 12AT7 driver valve

13 The mustard-coloured 3300pF capacitor connects between the 1M grid resistor and the wire loop that replaced the 250pF capacitor from the blackface tonestack

14 The reverb send was relocated from point 'X' to pin 1 of V1a with a 3300pF capacitor replacing the stock 500pF capacitor and a 100K resistor to tame the level

after the make-up gain stage for the Princeton Reverb stack, but the tweed/brownface stack rejoins the signal path beyond this point. So it effectively bypasses the reverb send.

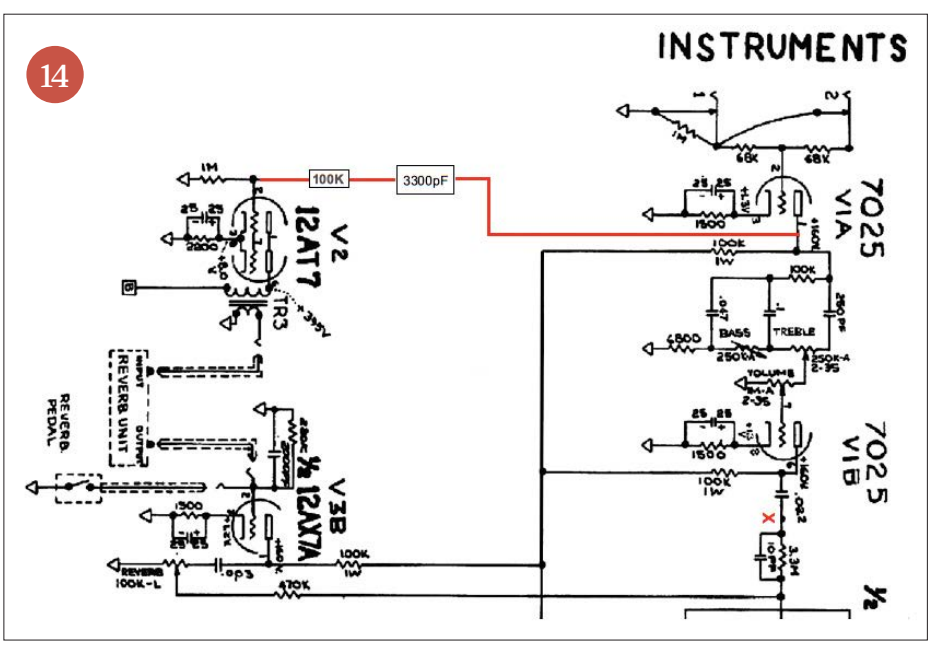
Lately, you may have read some highly enthusiastic reviews of Swart amps in these pages and a big part of the appeal is the full-bodied reverb tone. Checking out Swart's reverb circuit and the Gibson amps that inspired it, it can be seen that the reverb feed is taken after the first amplification stage, rather than post-tonestack.

Although a coupling capacitor is placed between the anode of V1a and the grid of the reverb driver valve, there's a fairly full frequency signal reaching the reverb. Contrast this with the stock Princeton Reverb arrangement, where the tonestack scoops away the midrange and a 500pF coupling capacitor then rolls off more of the low end.

The signal reaching the reverb is mostly the upper midrange and top end of the guitar signal, so as a result, Fender reverb effects can seem like they're separate from the dry guitar tone and the effect can be a bit grainy and splashy when the reverb is turned up high. Many people like this tone, myself included, but I find it more useful as an occasional effect. At lower levels, I struggle to find the balance between too much and too little reverb. In contrast, the Swart-style reverb tends to gel better with the dry signal – more like a studio effect – and the splashiness isn't apparent.

To make the reverb work with both tonestacks, I began by lifting one leg of the 500pF capacitor where it joins the 0.02uF capacitor coming from pin 6 of V1. A new wire was soldered to the lifted leg at one end then soldered to the loop wire that had replaced the 250pF capacitor when it was relocated to the tonestack switch. Everything worked as I had hoped, but I was hearing some weird artefacts in the reverb.

Figuring this was probably a result of excessive signal, I wired a 100K resistor between the hookup wire and pin 7 of V2 **12**. This fixed the overload issue, but the reverb sounded a bit thin. After a few attempts playing boutique bingo with capacitor values, I settled on a value of 3300pF, which I wired between the stock 1M grid resistor of V2 and the loop wire **13**. To my ears, this value provided the best balance

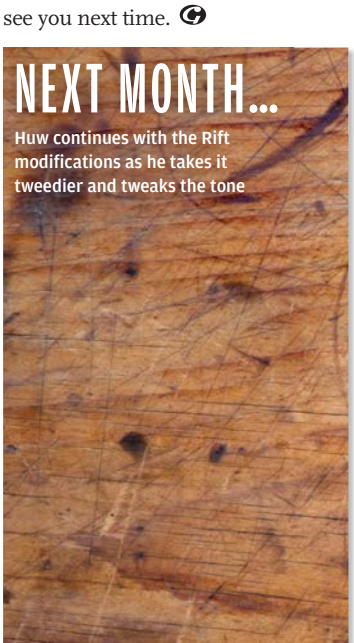


of reverb tone and clarity with some bass rolled off, but a full and lush effect 14.

Back together

Although I can hear a slight pop when switching between tonestacks, it doesn't bother me unduly – and I'm delighted that I can era-hop without losing what I liked about the Rift PR18 to start with. There is a big change in tonal character, but the level difference isn't excessive and the treble/tone knob doesn't need drastic adjustment as you go from one mode to the other.

I'm particularly pleased with the reverb and while it may not please Fender reverb fanatics, I find the configuration I ended up with a bit more playable and useful for my style. I'm done for now, but my head is spinning with ideas about biasing, negative feedback and even tweedier tones. Unfortunately, all that will have to wait until Part 2, so see you next time.



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Fender American Professional Stratocaster & Telecaster

It's out with the Standard and in with the Professional, as Fender overhauls its US workhorses for 2017. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** goes Pro...

Towards the end of 2016, Fender's American Standard Series began to be heavily discounted at retailers, which could mean only one thing – new models were on the horizon. For 2017, Fender has decided to rebrand the range entirely, and the new American Professional Series features a series of upgrades across the board, including new V-Mod pickups designed by in-house pickup guru Tim Shaw, treble-bleed circuits, a new 'Modern Deep-C' neck profile and impressive Elite moulded hardshell cases with TSA (Transportation Security Administration) approved latches. You'll see various other American Pro models, including modern takes on the Jaguar and Jazzmaster in these pages in the coming months but, first, our attention turns to the benchmark Stratocaster and Telecaster models.

We spoke to Tim Shaw to get the skinny on the new V-Mod pickups. "Justin Norvell asked me to start working on the Strat and Tele pickups for the American Pro series a bit over a year ago," explains Shaw. "We'd refreshed American Vintage and transformed American Deluxe into American Elite, and for 2017 we planned to update the American Standard models. Our general concept was that of refinement; nothing about American Standard as a concept was 'broken', but we knew it could be better, even if the changes were subtle. With the pickups, there was a challenge to improve them without sacrificing the broad appeal they already enjoyed.

"I do pickup design for several brands within FMIC, and I'd been working with most of the commonly available alnico magnet materials for various other projects. Each alnico alloy has its own tone due to the chemical composition of the magnets, and I decided to try mixing materials within individual pickups. While this has been done on a limited scale in the past, I felt that it would be possible – and interesting – to mix and voice the pickups and their magnets as systems. We have various magnet combinations for different musical purposes on the Teles and Strats, and on the basses as well. On the Strats, for instance, >

"Nothing about American Standard as a concept was 'broken', but we knew it could be better" – Tim Shaw

Bent-steel saddles and a two-point vibrato see vintage and modern features combine

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
If the upgraded specifications aren't a deal-breaker then we recommend scouring retailers for end-of-the-line pricing on **Fender American Standard** Strats and Teles – with Custom Shop pickups, these are no slouches tonally and, as Shaw suggests, far from 'broken'. Elsewhere, there isn't exactly a shortage of high-end Strat and Tele-inspired instruments with modern updates. Look for the usual suspects, such as **Tom Anderson**, **Schecter**, **G&L**... the list goes on!

Tim Shaw's new V-Mod pickups use mixed magnet types for the Strat neck and middle units. The Stratocaster's rosewood slab board has an attractive grain and is a smooth, easy-playing surface with a 9.5-inch radius and 22 narrow tall frets that are equivalent to Dunlop's popular 6105 fretwire

it's important to have each pickup sound good, but the unique character of positions two and four has to be preserved as well. So the neck pickup has alnico II for the wound strings and alnico III for the trebles. The middle pickup has alnico II for the basses and alnico V for the trebles, and the bridge pickup has alnico V all the way across. We also adjusted and voiced the magnet wire on the individual coils so that the whole set worked well as a system, and added a model-specific treble-bleed circuit as well. We voiced the treble-bleed circuits individually for each model in the American Pro Series, based on the pickup combinations.

"The Tele pickups have alnico V magnets for the wound strings and alnico II magnets for the plain strings; this is different than what we used for the Strats. The neck pickup is based on the taller coil structure of the Twisted Tele, which is my favourite Tele neck single coil. In this case, the alnico combinations gave us the focused and punchy lows we've come to expect from Telecasters, while fattening up the treble strings."

The R&D process took place in California and Tennessee, as Shaw is a Nashville resident: "I asked my colleagues in Corona R&D to have sets of Strat pickups and Tele single coils wound with the different magnet combinations I wanted to try," says Shaw. "I wound all the prototype Shawbucker sets here in Nashville and shipped them to Corona to be installed in the test guitars we used.

"I then flew out to Corona and we spent several days listening to a lot of guitars! This would also involve swapping pickups from one guitar to another to insure that what we were hearing wasn't influenced by a particular instrument. Since we already knew most of the structural changes we were making in the series, we'd have these present on the test guitars so we could hear what they'd sound like in production. We also did A/B testing with American Standard models."

Raising Standards?

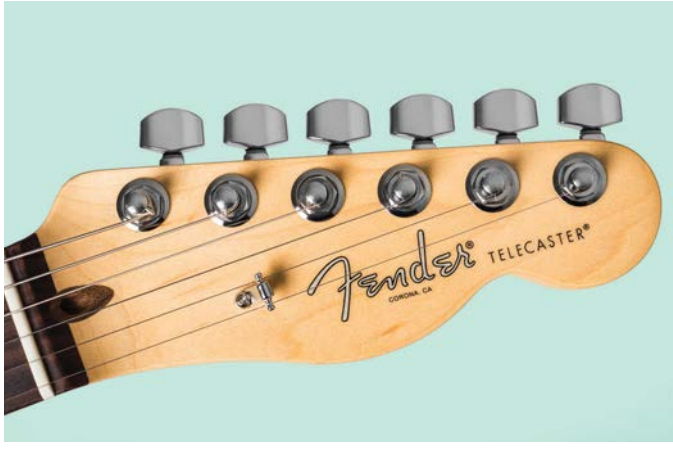
The level of construction is generally very high across both review instruments, although the curve that has been cut out of the Telecaster's scratchplate to accommodate the end of the control plate has a rather rough edge, as does the area cut out for the bridge plate. The Strat's plastics are neater, but we found it impossible to align the bridge saddles in such a way that allows the high and low E strings to pass over the centre of the pole-pieces of the bridge and neck pickups simultaneously. In the interest of the strings not being too close to the fingerboard edges, we opted for a set-up that saw the E strings pass over the inside edge of their respective neck pickup pole-pieces.

Despite minor dimensional differences, both necks have near-identical neck profiles: Fender's new 'Modern Deep-C' is actually a slim C profile that fills out a little as you approach the 12th fret. Aided by lightly rolled rosewood fingerboard edges, it quickly disappears in the hand, and we think it feels less generic and a little more considered than that of previous US Standard models. The Strat's 'board in particular has a very attractive figure, but both slabs of rosewood appear to be of high quality.

The Telecaster is the weightier of the two guitars, but neither is a chore when strapped on, and both display promising levels of acoustic volume, sustain and resonance. Time to plug in...

In use

The Telecaster immediately has a lovely brightness and clarity that has enough supporting depth to avoid sounding thin or scratchy, unless that's what you're after and you force the issue with EQ. Its natural voice is bright and clear but well balanced with plenty of



chime and sustain, bringing to mind everything from Bakersfield twang to Jeff Buckley.

Shaw's Telecaster pickups can get greasy and Stones-y when you wind up the gain a little, too, and the neck unit has a nicely flutey, slightly nasal quality in conjunction with drive. You can hear the springy, Strat-flavoured heritage of the Twisted Tele unit from which Shaw drew inspiration and – dare we say it – it's a lot more interesting than many genuine vintage and vintage-inspired Telecaster neck pickups we've tried. In a direct A/B comparison, it's arguably slightly zestier than the Strat's neck unit, although the latter's smooth vibrato action (which returns to pitch perfectly even with the rather light .009-gauge supplied strings and a three-spring set-up) does allow for more dramatic, Jimi-esque histrionics.

In all five positions, the Strat is incredibly percussive and dynamic – it'll take a heavier set of strings to take the tone all the way down to Texas, but even as supplied, into a clean American valve amplifier, there's an explosive range of tones under your fingers from the outset that reminds you that in 2017, just as in 1954, there's no more expressive and lyrical platform available to a soloist than a good Stratocaster.

Make no mistake – this is a good Stratocaster, and it's no slouch for rhythm either, whether you are chasing Jimi or Biffy Clyro tones, or almost anything in between in the wide-ranging musical kaleidoscope created by Strat players over the years. Sure, this is a bright-sounding example, but turning our 6V6-powered combo up into the realms of overdrive proves that it's smooth and sophisticated, too, and not overly shrill or brittle.

Both treble bleed circuits are well voiced, and once again we find ourselves plugging directly into a tweedy combo with a smidgen of reverb and finding that a good guitar with a variety of great tones onboard and a volume control that doesn't make things muddy when it's backed off is all the pedalboard we need.

As reinventions go, American Professional is perhaps not the most dramatic we've ever seen, but there's definitely something about the considered combination of new features and well-chosen materials here that elevates these instruments from 'standard' workhorses into slightly more luxurious territory. Pro tools indeed.

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Professional Stratocaster

- **PRICE** £1,399 (inc Elite hardshell case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway, bolt-on neck electric. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, 'Modern Deep C' maple neck with 9.5" radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 narrow tall frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** 2-point Synchronized vibrato bridge with bent steel saddles and pop-in arm, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x V-Mod single-coil Stratocaster pickups, 5-position blade pickup selector switch, master volume with treble-bleed circuit, neck tone, bridge/middle tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.4mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.8mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.6mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.6lbs/3.4kg
- **FINISHES** Sonic Gray (as reviewed), 3-Color Sunburst, Antique Olive, Black, Olympic White, Sienna Sunburst gloss polyurethane. Sienna Sunburst model features an ash body. Maple and rosewood fingerboard options available in all colours. Necks feature satin urethane finishes with gloss urethane headstock faces (rosewood and maple) and fingerboards (maple only)
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Percussive, dynamic, everything a good Strat should be
+ Comfortable neck shape
+ Smooth vibrato action

– Difficult to align strings evenly across all three pickups

Professional by name, professional by nature. This is every inch a pro guitar

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Professional Telecaster

- **PRICE** £1,399 (inc Elite hardshell case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway, bolt-on neck electric. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Ash body, 'Modern Deep C' maple neck with 9.5" radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 narrow tall frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** 3x compensated brass saddle string-through-body Tele bridge with modern 'ashtray' cover, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x V-Mod single-coil Telecaster pickups, 3-position blade pickup selector switch, master volume with treble-bleed circuit, master tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.7mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.9mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 53.2mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.9lbs/3.6kg
- **FINISHES** Natural (as reviewed or maple fingerboard), 2-Color Sunburst (ash body, maple 'board only), 3-Color Sunburst (alder body, maple or rosewood 'board), Black (maple 'board only, alder body), Butterscotch Blonde (maple 'board only, ash body), Crimson Red Transparent (rosewood 'board only, ash body), Mystic Seafoam (maple 'board only, alder body), Olympic White (alder body, rosewood 'board only), Sonic Gray (alder body, rosewood 'board only). Necks feature satin urethane finishes with gloss urethane headstock faces (rosewood and maple) and fingerboards (maple only)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Bright-but-not-too-bright classic Tele bridge and middle sounds
+ Surprisingly versatile neck pickup
+ Bridge design works well

– Scratchplate has some rough edges

A vintage and modern blend with toneful results. Not the prettiest finish option, but a great player's guitar

9/10

RIVOLTA COMBINATA £1,099
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Rivolta Combinata

A Dennis Fano guitar for the masses? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** samples the fruits of an interesting collaboration...

What's in a name? You'll doubtless recognise that of Dennis Fano, the eponymous founder of Fano Guitars and the man who has more recently been building wonderful offset-body electrics in Fleetwood, Pennsylvania under the Novo Guitars banner.

The Novo instruments we've played have all been very difficult to put down. Yet, although Dennis Fano is often to be found residing in the uppermost branches of the boutique-electric tree right now, that hasn't stopped him seeking out a way to make his designs more affordable and accessible to the guitar-playing public.

In partnership with Mike Robinson of Eastwood Guitars – a company known for its affordable recreations of vintage pawnshop and catalogue guitars by the likes of Harmony and Airline – Fano's latest venture finds him designing instruments for production and distribution via Eastwood's existing facilities and distribution channels.

'Novo', from the Latin *novus*, means new – and Fano's new Eastwood-made electrics are branded with a name with a similar inspiration behind it, as Dennis explains: "Rivolta is the Italian word for 'revolt'. The plan for Rivolta is to do fresh new takes on some of my earlier work. We call it 'evolutionary design'."

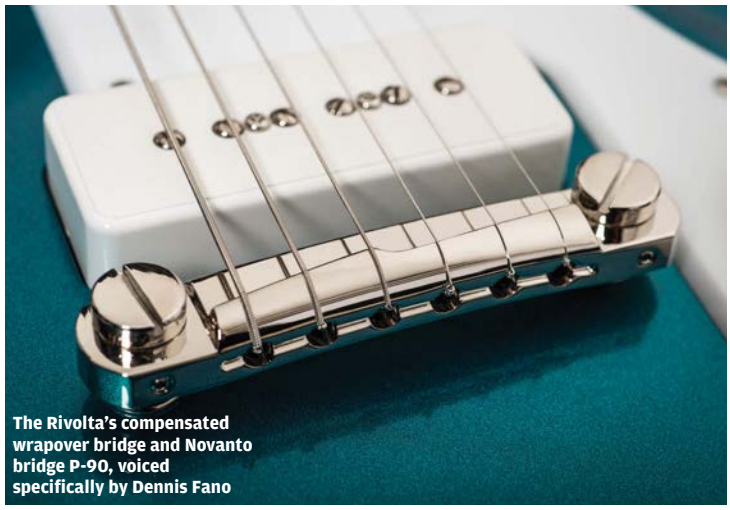
If you like what you see on these pages, you'll be pleased to know that the Combinata is merely the first model in the new Rivolta line. Fans of Fano's back catalogue and students of Rickenbacker's 1950s output will find the outline familiar: "It is the not-too-distant cousin of my RB6 design," says Dennis. "Combinata is Italian for 'combination' – I chose that name because the inspiration for the RB6 was the Rickenbacker Combo 800.

"The RB6 body is fairly diminutive compared to most solidbodies," Dennis continues. "So I wanted to give the Combinata a slightly larger and slightly offset body. I want it to read Combo/RB6 at a glance, but I also wanted to give it a little movement and make it more ergonomic."

How does the process of designing instruments that are manufactured in South Korea compare with overseeing bespoke builds in a small workshop environment? "Partnering with Mike Robinson and working with his team at Eastwood Guitars has been great. They've been working with the overseas factories for many years, but it's brand-new territory for me.

"Initially, I figured that I'd have to make a few compromises in order to get these instruments made, but that has not been the case. The process has actually been a lot of fun and >

Fans of Dennis Fano's back catalogue and students of Rickenbacker's 1950s output will find the outline familiar



The Rivolta's compensated wrapover bridge and Novanto bridge P-90, voiced specifically by Dennis Fano

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £1,099 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway chambered electric guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Chambered, double-bound mahogany body with German-carved mahogany top, set maple 'C+' neck with bound 12-inch radius rosewood fingerboard, mother-of-pearl block inlays, 24 medium-jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Compensated wrapover bridge, Wilkinson vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Rivolta Novanta P-90 pickups, volume, tone, three-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25-inch
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.2mm at nut, 52.0mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.1mm at first fret, 23.7mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.8mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.1lbs
- **FINISH** Adriatic Blue Metallic (as reviewed), Pomodoro Red Metallic, Toro Black Metallic, Autunno Burst. Autunno Burst features a maple top. Deluxe Trem models in all finishes are £1,259
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com** **www.rivoltaguitars.com**

The striking, colour-matched headstock design, with Wilkinson tuners

The Combinata's dramatic, deep-dish German carve on display

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
There are several models in the **Italia** range that are a successful mash-up of retro influences. Our picks are the Ricky-ish **Rimini 6** semi **£779** and the Supro/Airline-inspired **Mondial Classic £799**. Though it doesn't have a wrapover bridge, the **Gibson 2016 SG Standard P-90 Traditional £899** is a relatively affordable route towards those vintage Who live tones. For the full-on high-end Dennis Fano experience, check out the **Novo Guitars Serus J £2,999**.

the build quality of these guitars is excellent. I am really impressed with the look, the feel, the tone and the playability of these guitars."

With its dramatic, sweeping German carve, the double-bound Combinata is a cool-looking creature, presented here in a metallic Adriatic Blue finish that's probably closest to Ocean Turquoise in terms of the vintage Fender/DuPont colour palette. We suspect that the level of visual bling may polarise opinion – just look at those iridescent, genuine mother of pearl fretboard inlays – but the less retrofuturistic colour scheme of the maple-top Autunno Burst model is well worth checking out if you are more conservatively minded.

Removing the acrylic scratchplate reveals full-size 500k volume and tone pots and a decent standard of wiring. The Korean-made three-way toggle switch is stamped 'JA' on the side of the box that houses its electronics. It's an economy option and although its operation is a little stiff, this will at least help prevent a stray right arm from accidentally switching pickups at an inopportune moment. The Novanta P-90 pickups themselves are less of an off-the-shelf solution. Fano says he was "able to spec the output and magnets to my liking".

Strapped-on balance is excellent thanks to the upper strap button position and the sizeable solid section running through the centre of the chambered mahogany body. Access to the highest frets is slightly impaired, but at least there are 24 of them – players used to a 21- or 22-fret neck may not feel the need to head that far north anyway.

In use

There's something about a wrapover bridge and a pair of soapbars that gets those in the know excited – for all the Combinata's slightly kitsch stylings, plug this into a non-master volume amp such as a tweed or old Marshall, crank the amp until it's loud and overdriven and you'll find yourself grasping the reins of a muscular rock 'n' roll animal. It sets our pulse racing – it really does – but also stays well behaved enough in terms of noise for proper stage use. Anyone who has seen footage of The Who at The Isle Of Wight or heard *Live At Leeds* will know that a pair of P-90s will also hollow out when you roll back the volume, giving you access to cleaner, almost acoustic-sounding tones great for Townshend-style strumming. It doesn't do the near-supernatural pseudo-acoustic upper harmonics of a 1950s Gibson solidbody loaded with P-90s, but it would be unfair to expect that from a brand-new instrument at this price point. Compared directly to one of Dennis' high-spec Novos fitted with Amalfitano P-90s that we had on hand during the testing process, the Combinata actually shouts slightly louder, with more grind and attitude – it's not quite as refined, but isn't a voice that feels like any kind of compromise.

Crank the amp until it's overdriven and you'll find yourself grasping the reins of a muscular rock 'n' roll animal

Winding the amp back into cleaner territory, with added spring reverb the hum-cancelling combination of both pickups offers a really authentic voice for 60s beat styles and the neck alone is mellow and smooth and suited to fifties comping; just don't expect liquid sustain for soloing without a helping hand from extra compression and gain. Although the big frets and 25-inch scale length make string-bending easy, the Combinata's slightly clipped decay above the 12th fret suits taut, wiry lead passages far better than it does slow, languid bends.

If you're wondering whether this is a cheap Fano or an upscale Eastwood, the answer is... in many ways, it's both. The poly finish feels more like standard Eastwood fare and it's undeniable that what you get for your money from Dennis' high-end instruments is a more crafted, organic feel with more personality and attention to detail. However, for a third of the price of a Novo, it's hard to complain about an instrument that, aside from a little scruffiness around the fingerboard binding, has been built very cleanly.

Overall, the first Rivolta model represents a hugely successful collaboration that brings Dennis Fano's design to a price point that a much wider audience can access – this can only be a positive, so we look forward to seeing what shape the next Rivolta takes.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent palette of sounds, some of which are genuinely thrilling
+ Ticks the right boxes for retro fans who want a serious, stable stage guitar that looks a million dollars
- Access to all 24 frets isn't easy when played standing
- Price stretches many people's definition of 'affordable'

Dennis Fano is on a roll right now – and may 2017 bring plenty more where this came from!

9/10

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VOL
TONE
VOL
DOOM
SLOW AS SMOOTH
SMOOTH AS FAST

Teye Pistolero

Inspired by his late friend Tony Zemaitis, Dutch luthier Teye Wijnterp's Pistolero hails from his 'entry-level' Super-T Series and features Mood-altering tones. **HUW PRICE** draws first...

The influences are obvious. From the headstock shape to the hardware, and from the body shape to the metal front, the Pistolero is every ounce a Zemaitis-style guitar. This reviewer is one of the privileged few to have played and closely examined a couple of vintage Tony Zemaitis electrics – and they weren't quite what he had anticipated. Touted by many of the biggest names in the guitar business during the 1970s, Zemaitis was a builder to the stars and, as such, you might expect stellar workmanship and exquisite attention to detail.

Instead, they're miles away from what we consider a premium-grade instrument in this day and age. The woodworking and finishing appears pretty rough and there are bizarre period touches, such as fingerboard binding that has been sawn through to create fret slots. What you do get is an abundance of individual style and attitude, with customised motifs. Zemaitis' hardware was bespoke, too, fashioned from massive blocks of aluminium. The vibe is unique because, despite the slightly crude quality, the original guitars feel as if they were made with considerable care.

Teye has taken some shortcuts on this Pistolero model but even so, much of the exotic Zemaitis vibe has been captured. The satin oil finish has a period feel with open wood pores, and the body appears to have been hand-sanded.

The body itself is formed from three pieces of mahogany, and there are several chip-outs along the join that perhaps could have been filled prior to finishing. At first, we didn't notice the joins because of the spalted-type figuring, but since this figuring criss-crosses the join, it is either a transfer or has been applied by hand. Either way, it looks pretty good.

Tony Zemaitis' most iconic guitars are probably the shotgun chic metal-fronted models that were engraved by Danny O'Brien. The Pistolero has the O'Brien look – from a distance at least – but the patterns are screen-printed rather than engraved onto the aluminium sheet. The headstock plate departs from the O'Brien style, with more of a graffiti aesthetic.

The neck has an authentic Zemaitis feel, with a wide and flat D profile, square shoulders and a full >

The straight-ahead humbucker sound is pure 70s rock, with thickly barking mids and ample output

The Mood control is a brilliant innovation that scoops out the mids

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £3,200
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string electric guitar, manufactured in USA
- **BUILD** Three-piece mahogany body with set mahogany neck and slim D profile, bound ebony fingerboard with pearl Teye inlay and 24 frets, aluminium headstock and face plates
- **HARDWARE** Teye Super Sustain tailpiece and bridge, Grover Super Rotomatic Imperial tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Custom-wound DiMarzio humbucking pickups, individual volume, master tone, Mood and three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44.5mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 50.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.65kg/8lbs
- **CONTACT** Teye Guitars, (+31) 615 866 0846 **www.teye.com**

The Pistolero's body plates are printed rather than engraved

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Zemaitis guitars are still in production under the auspices of the company run by Tony Zemaitis Jr. The **MFJ-101-NT** **£2,799** features engraved body and neck plates with Dragon Classic Pickups. Ron Wood is probably the player most closely associated with Zemaitis, and his **Duesenberg DTV** model **£3,341** has an Aztec-inspired pearl block overlay.

complement of 24 frets. It feels very much like the real thing, and it's the sort of profile that was once all the rage but is now seldom seen. It's actually more of a shred-friendly neck than something you'd associate with a classic from the 'golden era'.

With its scarf-jointed headstock and set neck, the Pistolero has a solid, stable feel, and despite the metal parts and the 'stairstep' Grover tuners, it balances well and isn't too weighty thanks to a body chamber. The Super Sustain bridge and tailpiece parts are 'in the spirit of' rather than slavish copies, but they have an authentically chunky presence and there is a brass block under the aluminium tailpiece cover.

The Pistolero packs two custom-wound DiMarzio humbuckers with individual volume controls, master tone and a 'Mood' control. The Mood control components are hidden under a plastic bottle cap, which is preferable to epoxy goop, but it means we can't say what's going on electronically – though Teye says it's all-analogue and that the concept is that it allows you to "switch guitars" mid-song.

In use

Trick wiring was all the rage in the 70s, with countless switches, added controls and onboard preamps providing myriad tonal options that were mostly of little practical use. The Pistolero honours that tradition, but the controls are straightforward and every tone impresses. Both volume controls reduce the level without losing clarity and the tone control does its job. The pickups are connected to a five-way switch that does the neck/both/bridge thing with a Peter Green-style out-of-phase setting between the neck and middle positions. Between middle and bridge, the sound has the flavour of a Strat's in-between sound and is a combination of both bridge coils with one coil from the neck.

The straight-ahead humbucker sound is pure 70s rock, with thickly barking mids and ample output to overdrive an amp. Think glam rock or punk powerchords. The slightly nasal upper-midrange bridge tone contrasts with the smoother and plummier neck, but it's really variations on an extremely enjoyable theme.

The Mood control is a masterstroke. It scoops out the mids for countrified tones without substantially reducing the level. Tapping the slugs, we suspect it's a coil fader control that sweeps from humbucker to single-coil operation, plus maybe a hint of equalisation, but Teye is understandably coy about the tech specs. The Mood knob turns the Pistolero's ballsy rock tone into a quackier, twangier, more jangly proposition. You can also blend the pickups any which way because they don't do the LP 'one off, both off' thing in the middle position. In fact, both pickups combined with the Mood fully engaged does a pretty impressive Filter'Tron impersonation. This is one instance where spoiling you with choice doesn't spoil the guitar.

Given the price, we would be remiss not to point out a few minor construction gripes such as some scraping scratches on the fingerboard binding and slight finish imperfections around the neck and fingerboard joints. Also, the bridge height adjustment wheels and the ends of the bridge are as sharp as they look, so Townshend-style windmillers be warned!

Otherwise, the Pistolero captures the Zemaitis spirit and sound in an uncanny way, and you get recognisably classic tones without being constrained by the over-familiar. Great fun!

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Vast array of high-quality tones
+ Very cleverly arranged controls
+ Easy playability and rock-solid tuning

- Carelessly scraped binding
- Body plates printed rather than engraved

Great looks, a huge range of tones and excellent playability all rolled into a single guitar, so all you need is flares

8/10

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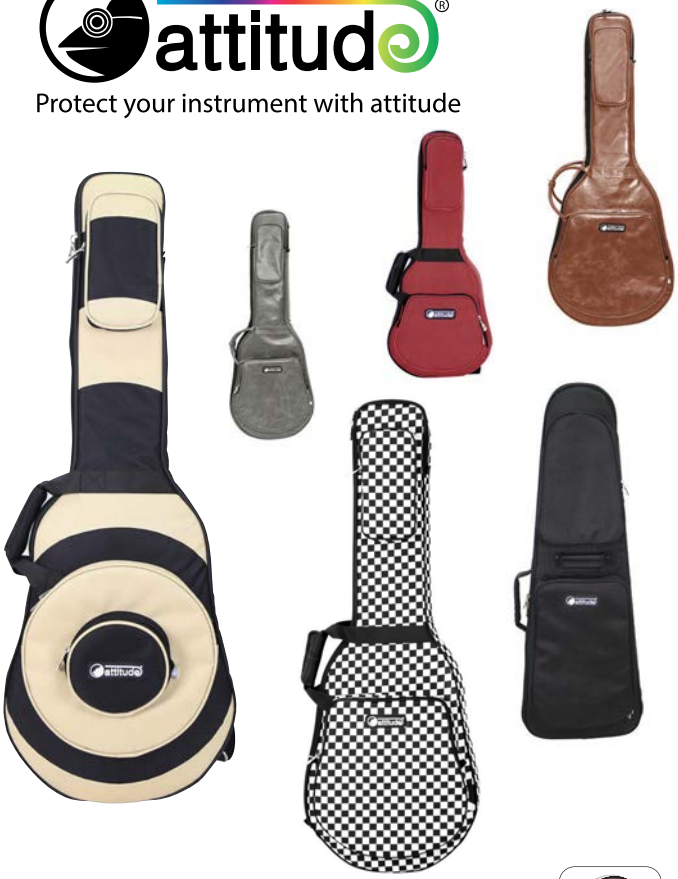

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Bacchus G-Studio EWC Sakura & Imperial Pro Acacia

Two high-end Japanese electrics from a brand name that's relatively new to Blighty. **SIMON BRADLEY** plugs in...

If you ever get the chance to visit the Land of the Rising Sun, we can heartily recommend setting aside a day or three to wander around one of Ishibashi Music's humungous metropolitan guitar stores.

Aside from the inevitable array of Nashville-style singlecuts that push the boundaries of various trademarks to breaking point, around another corner, you'll find Japan-only wonders from the far more familiar likes of ESP, Fender and Ibanez. Take it from us; your eyes will pop out on stalks as readily as they would during a saunter around any equivalent emporium in New York or Nashville: that goes for a visit to the website, too.

Also readily available at such stores are instruments from Bacchus, a Japanese brand that is now being made available in Blighty thanks to the efforts of long-time collector and dealer of vintage Japanese guitars, Joe Summerfield of Hampshire's The Guitar Den. Alongside an ever-popular selection of S-, T- and LP-type electrics and other recognisable designs are guitars such as the pair we have on test, one from the Bacchus Craft series and the other from the Handmade range.

All instruments in the Handmade series are constructed at the Bacchus Aska plant in Nagano and the G-Studio Sakura is an example of the limited Exotic Wood Collection. All guitars in the EWC range feature an ash body topped with woods that have a particular significance within Japanese culture, including burl maple, magnolia and claro walnut. Our model features a bookmatched top of sakura or cherry blossom wood, and the grade used here has a dark honey, almost orange, hue with some lovely figuring to boot. A thin strip of black set between the sakura and ash accents the attractive nature of these woods very effectively and the vibe is complemented by a purpleheart fingerboard bristling with cherry-inlay fret markers. There's a purpleheart inlay on the sakura-faced headstock, too, and, put simply, this is one gorgeous guitar.

The pickups come from US maker Mojotone and comprise a PW Hornet humbucker in the bridge alongside >

Bacchus is a Japanese brand that's now available here, thanks to vintage Japanese guitar collector, Joe Summerfield

The G-Studio has dandy cherry-blossom fret markers on its purpleheart fingerboard

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Bacchus G-Studio EWC Sakura

The **Suhr Standard Pro** **£2,559** is available in a number of sumptuous finishes and all fixtures and fittings are right out of the top drawer. Don't miss the excuse to cruise the Fender Custom Shop yet again, and track down the sumptuous **Guthrie Govan Signature Model** from **Charvel** **£3,138** too. It won't make you play like him, but you'll look and sound great in the attempt.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Bacchus Imperial Pro Acacia

Give either the **ESP E-II ST-1** **£1,520** or the **Ibanez RG652K** **£989** a spin. The former's blackwood body and maple/walnut neck will turn heads wherever you go, while the latter comes loaded with Duncan pickups and a Floyd Rose. The more affordable **Charvel Pro Mod San Dimas HH** **£759** mixes Cali cool with a workhorse spec and there are numerous finishes to choose from. Neon Pink, anyone?

The Imperial Pro Acacia's understated headstock

a pair of Two-Face single coils. The electronics incorporate a volume and tone, plus a microswitch coil tap for the bucker. Fascinatingly, the singles include a mix of magnets within their traditional bobbins: ceramic for the three bass strings and alnico V for the treble trio.

The Bacchus Craft series, atop which this Imperial Pro resides, also includes a selection of familiar designs and is an attempt to provide guitars with the same build quality as those from the Handmade series, but at a more competitive price. One way that Bacchus addresses this is by outsourcing certain aspects of the construction process to the Philippines. "All of the woodwork for both the Handmade and Craft series is done completely by hand, with no computerised CNC routing," Summerfield tells us. "The processes can be done more cheaply by Bacchus-trained luthiers in the Philippines, and the Craft series bodies and necks are then sent to Japan for inspection and final assembly. The savings are passed on to the customer."

Although the series offers its fair share of options, the Imperial Pro is available only with an acacia body. With a barely discernible oil finish, the body wood's dark-chocolate hue and subtle figuring is plain to see but, at over 9lbs in weight, this is a hefty beast for sure. We're struggling to recall if we've ever strummed an acacia-bodied electric guitar before and, again, the Imperial Pro has a striking appearance.

Pickups here are a ceramic Bacchus BHH humbucker and two alnico V SV-A5 single coils, which are screwed directly into the body: the three-ply pickguard is shaped around the units. The selection of hardware includes a Gotoh 1996T licensed Floyd Rose double-locking whammy unit and Gotoh SG360-071B tuners, while the maple neck and 24-fret rosewood 'board are sufficiently compact and rounded to provide a lovely playing experience.

Ceramic humbuckers can raise alarm bells in certain quarters, with a perceived lack of character often the main concern. Happily, there's no such issue with either guitar here, with the ash/sakura and acacia tonewoods giving ample body to the lows and mids to counteract any influence on the treble sides that the ceramic magnets may have.

Great for high-energy blues and better for rock, the Imperial Pro's focused tones are well worth experiencing and the modern feel of the neck should also satisfy most players. The single-coil options are nicely balanced and, to our ears, come across as slightly thicker versions of classic Strat tones. The vibrato is set with minimal uplift, but that's easily rectified should you prefer more semitones in this area, and the guitar is actually more versatile than we had assumed.

It's the G-Studio that really impresses, however, with all pickup selections giving perfect string separation irrespective of how high the amp gain is set. You can really hear the influence of the mix of single-coil pickup magnets when using the neck unit. The treble strings are mellow, of course, but the bass side, thanks to the pickup's ceramic coils, has a nice edge that doesn't mush up or become indistinct when going for that familiar warmth.

The neck's wide-yet-shallow D-profile, at first a little daunting in its girth, will quickly grow on you and we had no issues with the purpleheart fingerboard. It's not quite as figured as some grades of rosewood can be, but this is offset by the flurry of cherry-blossom petal fret markers.

Both guitars are very well made indeed and, while we feel that the Imperial Pro Acacia may initially struggle to stand out against the allure of similarly-spec'd instruments from more familiar names in the market, it's a pretty safe bet that the G-Studio Sakura will attract the most attention.

We love an over-the-top PRS or Les Paul as much as the next player, but less is certainly more with these two Bacchus models. So if you're looking for a high-quality solidbody electric that's a little removed from the flocks of flamed guitars dripping in gold out there, you should really check out the Sakura: it's even lovelier in the flesh.

In fact, it's probably one of the prettiest guitars we've seen in a while, and the best news is that its sounds as good as it looks.

KEY FEATURES

Bacchus G-Studio EWC Sakura

- **PRICE** £2,250 with gigbag
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway solidbody electric, made in Japan
- **BUILD** Two-piece select ash body with Sakura top, bolt-on maple neck with satin finish and 11" (280mm) radius purpleheart fretboard, 22 medium nickel/silver frets and bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Chrome Gotoh SG360-07C tuners, Gotoh 510T-FE1C two-point vibrato bridge with steel saddles
- **ELECTRICS** 1x Mojotone PW Hornet humbucker, 2x Mojotone Two-Face single coils, master volume and master tone with five-position switch and coil tap for humbucker
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5" (648mm)
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8lb/3.63kg
- **FINISHES** Natural with lacquer finish
- **CONTACT** The Guitar Den 7812 582628 **www.theguitarden.co.uk**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Gorgeous appearance
+ High construction values
+ Great tones, especially from the single coils
+ Superb neck
- No hardcase, just a gigbag

A truly excellent guitar with tones as impressive as its appearance. Initially seems a hefty price but, on balance, well worth it

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Bacchus Imperial Pro Acacia

- **PRICE** £1,130 with gigbag
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway solidbody electric, made in Japan and the Philippines
- **BUILD** Two-piece acacia body, bolt-on maple neck with 12.2" (310mm) radius rosewood fingerboard, 24 medium nickel/silver frets and locking Gotoh FGR-2 nut
- **HARDWARE** Black Gotoh SG360-071B tuners, double-locking Gotoh 1996T vibrato bridge with steel saddles
- **ELECTRICS** 1x Bacchus BHH humbucker, 2x Bacchus SV-A5 single coils, master volume and master tone with five-position switch and coil tap for humbucker
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5" (648mm)
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 41mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 9.2lb/4.17kg
- **FINISHES** Natural with oil finish

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Competitive price
+ Body-mounted pickups
+ Impressive neck
- Very weighty indeed for a bolt-on electric of this type
- Floyd Rose vibrato set rather conservatively

Very well made and with versatile tones, this is worth taking for a test drive. Just watch that weight...

7/10

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Oldamps Filmosound

With one foot in the 1940s and the other in the now, this repurposed cine-projector amplifier features vintage valves and transformers alongside brand-new components. **HUW PRICE** puts us in the picture

This reviewer's father has owned a slide projector since the early sixties and its infrequent outings on family occasions are always accompanied by the distinctive smell of very hot vintage electronics. So it's appropriate that this amplifier, repurposed from the audio amplifier in a 1940s Bell & Howell 16mm film projector, smells exactly the same.

These amps have become popular among DIY amp builders because they can be found fairly cheaply and they come with fine-quality transformers, a cool-looking pre-finished chassis and all the necessary valve sockets. Some merely tweak the Bell & Howell amplifier for guitar use, but others strip them out completely to install custom designs wired point-to-point with modern components.

Oldamps mainman Andy Drinkall does the latter, and his Filmosound is powered by a pair of cathode-biased 6V6 power valves generating 15 or 22 watts, depending on the rectifier valve. It can use a 5Y3GT or a 5Z4GT and, since it was originally constructed in the USA, it requires a 110v step-down transformer. Drinkall uses the existing preamp valves and the lineup may raise some eyebrows, because an EF37A pentode feeds an ECC35 (aka 6SL7) dual triode. Both are NOS Mullards and the EF37A has a beer bottletop wired as a grid screen.

The front panel has volume and tone, the power switch plus the original knobs, crackle-brown finish and a pop-riveted plate. The rear panel is slightly modified, with two toggle switches to accompany the 8- and 16-ohm speaker outputs. A three-way switch provides two boost settings by altering the cathode-bypass capacitor value of V2. The centre position is a non-boosted setting with no cathode bypass capacitor, which also disengages the capacitor in the 6V6 bias circuit. The other toggle switch engages two different cathode resistors on the second preamp, in order to adjust the clean headroom.

At first glance, the cabinet may look like something that was built in a shed and finished in a back yard, and it actually was – but look closer and you'll see it's a properly built box with dovetail joints. Yes, there's something slightly Heath Robinson about this amp, but it all adds to the considerable charm.

In use

The Filmosound doesn't come with a manual, but if you can't figure this amp out on your own, you probably shouldn't be operating electronic equipment. Fortunately, this is one of those rare amps that sounds pretty fantastic wherever the controls are positioned.

In addition to displaying the power status, the pilot light indicates the >

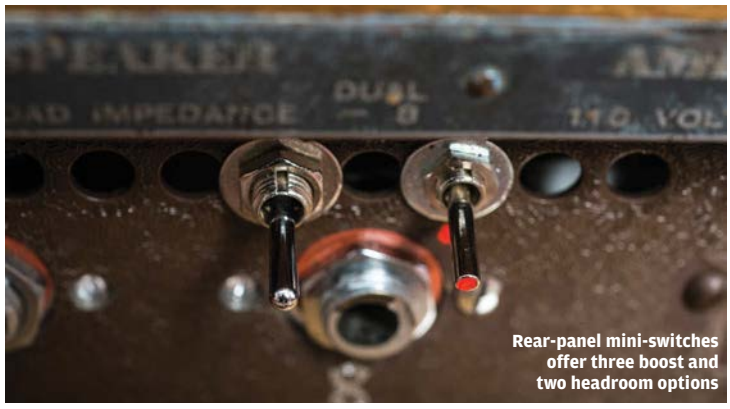
The Filmosound is one of those rare amps that sounds pretty fantastic wherever the controls are positioned

The Mullard EF37A on the far right has a beer bottletop shield

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £750
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel cathode-biased valve head, repurposed in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 15/22W
- **VALVES** EF37A, 6SL7GT, 2x 6V6, 5Z4 (with options for 5Y3 or 5AR4)
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input socket, volume, tone
- **REAR PANEL** 8-ohm and 16-ohm speaker outputs, 3-way boost switch, 2-way headroom switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 400x170x230mm
- **WEIGHT** 17.5kg/38.5lbs
- **OPTIONS** Customer requests accommodated
- **CONTACT** Oldamps 0114 258 9500 0785 785 7842 **oldamps.co.uk**

The tone control adds gain as you turn it clockwise


Rear-panel mini-switches offer three boost and two headroom options

Far from a mere gimmick, the Filmosound is a flexible amp for recording

Take a peek through the vent for the glow of reassurance that the Filmosound is ready

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

US session stars such as Blake Mills and Mason Stoops got hip to the charms of Bell & Howell conversions thanks to LA amp tech **Austen Hooks**. Also in the US, **At Mars Amplification** offers two amplifiers built into vintage Bell & Howell chassis. The **Specialist** appears to be an early-50s Fender-style design; the **Torque** is based on a brownface Deluxe and both are priced at **$989**. Other than that, you can take your chances with online auction sites...

Filmosound's state of readiness. As a result, nothing happens when you switch the amp on and you have to peer through the massive top vent to check for a warm orange heater glow, confirming all is well. The red pilot light joins the party when the Filmosound decides it's good to go.

The difference between the boost settings and the non-boosted setting is fairly dramatic, but the differences between the individual boost settings are subtler. We'll come back to that later, but for now, let's get started in non-boost mode with high headroom selected and the amp running through a Celestion G12H Greenback.

With the volume and tone set to halfway, Strat pickups push the Filmosound to the cusp of overdrive. The tone is wonderfully clear without excessive brightness and the midrange has a full and fluid quality that makes even the bridge pickup sound robust. Like some tweeds, the tone control adds gain as it's turned clockwise, but you can compensate by turning back the volume control if you want extra brightness with dynamically controlled breakup.

With the tone maxed out, the Filmosound produces a chiming treble that never gets shrill or brittle and the volume control hits the sweet spot very quickly, so there's a surprising amount of headroom. Even without overdrive, the Filmosound sustains very well; note decay is always smooth and it's easy to dial in old-school jazz tones. The Filmosound responds particularly well with P-90s to produce a horn-like honk.

Go flat-out on both controls and the Filmosound delivers fatness with clarity, amazing sustain and a velvety smooth richness that's harmonically complex, but well defined. The overdrive's character is a resonant roar rather than tweedy fierceness and is actually more reminiscent of 50s Gibson amps, or even a Trainwreck, to our ears.

The Filmosound's non-boost mode covers an awful lot of ground but the boost modes add extra dimensions. The boosts raise gain and reduce headroom, as you might expect, but in the down position you get a full frequency boost, which is perfect if you want some extra drive from single coils. The up position has a slight low-end rolloff that emphasises bite in the upper-mid frequencies. If you need to drive it hard with darker-sounding humbuckers, this boost mode helps to prevent the bass end becoming muddy or loose.

You may also notice a bit of extra treble with the boost modes engaged and, to our ears, some of the Filmosound's smoothness yields to a tad more edge and crunch. This is no bad thing, because you get a slightly different overdrive without losing the amp's fundamental voicing.

Moving over to a Les Paul, you can still dial in enough treble to make PAFs jangle without being forced to max out the tone control. You get articulate bite, swirly harmonics and the type of growly grind that would keep a swampy roots rocker entertained for hours. The exercise also demonstrates that the Filmosound is totally unfussy about pickups and may render any drive or boost pedals on your board redundant.

In our experience, surprisingly few modern amps match the treble sweetness and touch dynamics of really well-sorted vintage amps without some undercurrent of edginess. We can't say for sure whether it's vintage valves, original transformers – or even the period knobs! – but the Filmosound has those vintage qualities in abundance and with no nasty sonic artefacts.

So if anybody can tell us where to find another handwired amp with genuine vintage transformers and valves that sounds (and smells) as good as this for only £750, we'd love to hear about it...

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Stunning range of tones
+ Surprisingly versatile
+ Sweet treble
+ Well-defined bass

- Flimsy rear-panel switches
- Not the quietest circuit

Sure, there's a home-made vibe but the Filmosound sounds undeniably great and offers Premier League vintage tone for the cost of a mid-priced PCB amp

9/10

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Taylor 712e 12-Fret

Taylor has updated its popular 700 Series acoustics, refining the range's looks and tweaking the designs for a more powerful, roots-focused voice. **HUW PRICE** saddles up the 12-Fret model...

Taylor brands its newly 'revoiced' 700 Series as a 'Rosewood Reboot,' promising a richer tone together with refined 'neo-vintage' style. Predictably enough, the first thing that grabbed us was the Western Sunburst gloss finish. It's beautifully done and a remarkable shade of soft brown graduating to honey amber in the middle. It doesn't look like a vintage burst, but it doesn't look particularly modern either: 'neo-vintage' is a perfect description. Flipping the body, we see straight-grained Indian rosewood with a deep chocolate brown and a hint of violet.

A pin-neat koa centre strip matches the koa binding, all of which comes from Taylor's sustainable tonewood project in Hawaii. Douglas fir is used to create a herringbone effect for the purfling and rosette, with thin bands of black separating the layers. It's all executed with real precision; the result is striking, yet subtle and harmonious.

Like the rosewood back and sides, the Lutz spruce top is solid – it's a naturally occurring hybrid of white and sitka spruce that is claimed to be similar to Adirondak spruce in tone. The fingerboard, bridge, pins and peghead overlay are all ebony, with a tropical mahogany neck. As usual, Taylor has stacked the heel and scarf-jointed the slotted headstock; the finish has a smooth, fast satin sheen. We think the abalone position markers and headstock logo sit beautifully with the warm sunburst tones. The bespoke open-gear tuners look the part, too, and we like the ivory-grain effect on the off-white buttons. As a design, it has flair and coherence, with none of the stark contrasts of older Taylor models.

Taylor seems to have a one-size-fits-all approach to pickups and every electro-acoustic Taylor in the catalogue now comes fitted with an Expression System 2 (ES2). It's a sleek and low-profile design, with three controls on the upper bout and three piezo sensors located behind, rather than under, the saddle.

In use

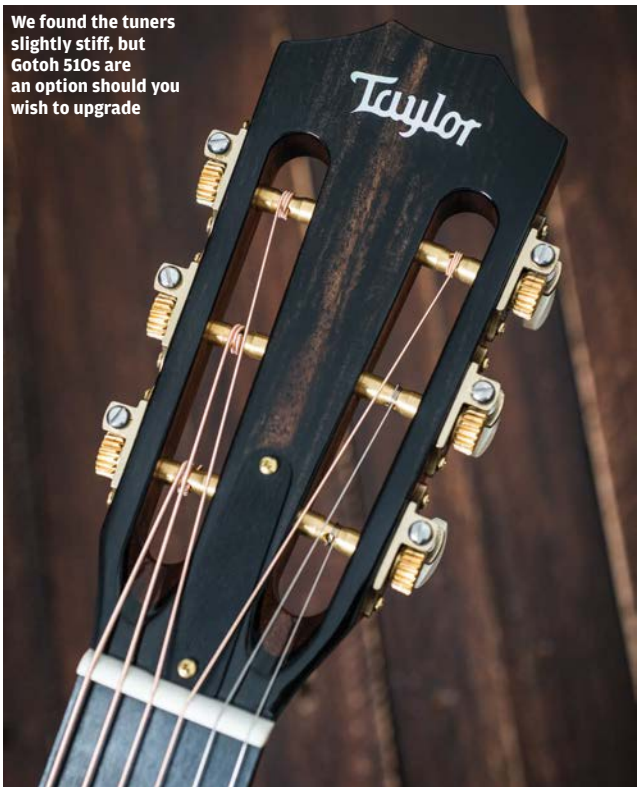
Frankly, it's hard to imagine how an acoustic guitar could be easier or >

Frankly, it's hard to imagine how an acoustic guitar could be easier or more comfortable to play than this

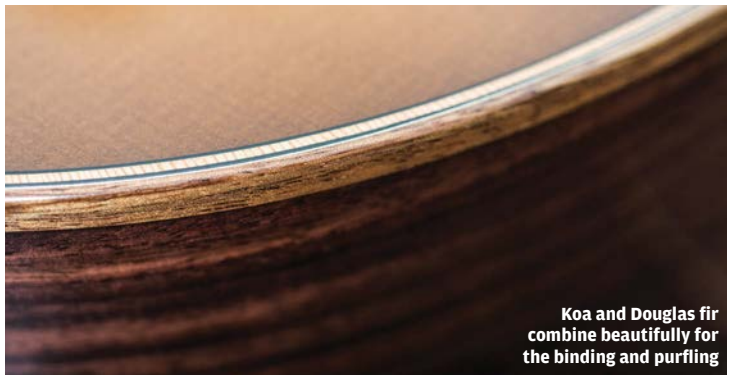
Taylor's open-gear tuners with ivory-grain effect buttons add to the visual appeal

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £3,141 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic 6-string guitar, made in the USA
- **BUILD** Lutz spruce top with Indian rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony bridge, fingerboard and peghead overlay, 12th-fret neck join, open-gear tuners with ivoroid buttons, Tusq nut and Micarta saddle, koa binding, Douglas fir purfling, ebony bridge pins with diamond markers
- **ELECTRICS** Taylor Expression System 2
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, at no extra charge
- **FINISH** Western Sunburst gloss body and clear satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631.52mm/24 7/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 7th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.88kg/4.1lbs
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**



We found the tuners slightly stiff, but Gotoh 510s are an option should you wish to upgrade


Koa and Douglas fir combine beautifully for the binding and purfling

The ebony fretboard features Taylor's abalone 'Reflections' inlays

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Bedell Angelica Bella Voce Orchestra** **£2,499** is a 12-fret-to-body slot-head with a cedar/rosewood body, Waverly tuners and a K&K pickup system. **Gibson's L-00 Mystic Rosewood** **£2,082** has a solid Sitka spruce top, solid mystic rosewood back and sides, and an LR Baggs Element VTC pickup.

more comfortable to play than this. It's likely down to the combination of low but buzz-free action, the short-ish scale length and the expertly slotted nut. Then there's 38mm string spacing at the nut that's equally picker and strummer friendly. The neck contributes, too, with a slim but not skinny profile that walks an assured line between vintage V and modern C. With the satin finish, it's grippy but fast, and the overall vibe is of instant familiarity.

Much the same could be said of the acoustic tone, because it has a dynamic immediacy that feels as though someone has spent the last few years playing the guitar in for you. We first noticed it with the bass end's warm punchiness and unexpected depth. Although the bass is well defined and has a nice hint of snappiness, the overriding characteristic is soft and slightly thuddy woodiness that really encourages you to dig in.

Treble response is another pleasant surprise. Fresh spruce and rosewood, in conjunction with a medium-sized body, can be a bright-sounding combination. However, the 712e displays a mellow maturity, which is by no means short on harmonic complexity, yet steers well clear of metallic ping. Instead, there's a very strong fundamental frequency, with more than enough overtones to add interest without cluttering chords or overpowering the lower registers.

However, the characteristic that really sets the 712e apart is its string-to-string balance and well-behaved nature. In a nutshell, it's very easy to play smoothly on this guitar, so if your fingerpicking technique isn't quite as well honed as it could be, the 712e is very forgiving.

Sonically, the 712e spans the eras – much like its neck profile. It's not an especially loud guitar, but it's perfectly loud enough and never sounds forced or crashy. There isn't even a trace of small-body boxiness and the midrange is both full and forward. Although perfectly suited to roots-related styles, it doesn't coerce you into a stylistic corner with a sonic identity that's too identifiable. In open tunings, it has a fluidity and balance few vintage guitars offer, but it's perhaps not bright or percussive enough for the 'beatbox' playing styles of recent years.

It's very easy to play smoothly: if your fingerpicking isn't as well honed as it could be, the 712e is very forgiving

Having reviewed several guitars with the ES2 of late, we expected more of the same. But that's not quite how things turned out. Firstly, the ES2 on this guitar has no audible noise floor – hiss and hum are entirely absent and there's no discernible resonant frequency.

Instead, you're presented with a very convincing electrified version of the natural acoustic sound, with the facility to gently tweak the bass and treble. The behind-the-saddle transducer placement ensures the sound and dynamics bear little resemblance to most undersaddle piezo systems and, by any measure, the ES2 produces professional-quality sound in conjunction with the 712e.

Open-tuning specialists may find the tuners a tad stiff for quick changes, but they're rock solid and Gotoh 510 tuners are an optional extra. We're not entirely convinced by the 'weathered brown' pickguard: we assumed an opaque protective layer of plastic was covering it until we researched the specs.

This is yet another in a line of recent Taylor models that has been turning preconceptions about the brand on their head. Many of the familiar features are there, including the pickguard, headstock and bridge shapes, but the overall vibe is completely different.

The 712e is precise without being clinical, inspiring rather than merely functional and it has a cuddly brown warmth that almost compels you to reach out to grab it for a quick strum every time it catches your eye.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Impressive bass response for the body size
+ Very easy to play
+ Extremely engaging acoustic tone
+ Pickup system complements guitar

- Some may prefer more treble
- Tuners rather stiff

The 712e is not a cheap guitar, but the playability, tone and build quality are commensurate with the price – and it looks fantastic. A guitar for life

9/10

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PRS SE Angelus A20E & A30E

This pair of electros from the Maryland maker offer a distinct flavour – **RICK BATEY** sees how they fare against the competition

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS SE Angelus A20E

If we stick to laminated back-and-sides models, the **Epiphone EF-500RCCE £649** is a mahogany cutaway electro with a solid cedar top. But this money can buy all-solid timber: the **Simon & Patrick CW GT Mini Jumbo Cedar A3T £729** has B-Band electronics and wild cherry back and sides; the **Faith FJCE Natural Jupiter Cut Electro £839** is impressive in spruce and mahogany.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS SE Angelus A30E

The Crafter JE18/N £669 is a handsome solid cedar/laminated rosewood cutaway jumbo with an LR Baggs pickup; the **Takamine GN93CE £598** is a nice cutaway NEX mini-jumbo with a solid spruce top and a laminated rosewood/maple back. Again, you've really got to look at **Faith Guitars** – the **FJCEHG Jupiter cutaway £979** matches the PRS for gloss finish but adds abalone, gold tuners and, most importantly, solid rosewood back and sides – and possibly **Furch Guitars**, too.

When the Korean-built PRS SE electrics first appeared some 16 years ago, they made players sit up and take notice. These were definitely not the kind of guitars born of an American maker simply selecting the offshore manufacturer who made the most tempting bid, chucking them some in-the-ballpark blueprints, and letting them get on with it: they looked the part, played the part and even, to many, retained a certain amount of PRS character.

But perhaps performing the same trick with acoustic guitars is tricker still: after all, any perceived tonal deficiencies cannot easily be cured by the twist of an amp knob or the replacement of a pickup, so the SE models on review this month have, if anything, a harder task when it comes to replicating the sound and feel of Paul Reed Smith's distinctive – and distinctly expensive – American-made acoustics.

Announced back in November 2015, the PRS SE A20E and A30E take over from the SE Angelus Standard and SE Angelus Custom models, and join the all-mahogany A10E and the thinline Alex Lifeson signature to form a simple, four-strong line-up of imported flat-top PRS guitars. Gone are the acoustic-only options of before: now, they're all electro-acoustics and prices have stayed much the same... or would have, had sterling not been going through a bit of a traumatic phase.

In terms of design, the current Angeluses (Angeli?) are very much the same as before. They are jumbo-esque in outline, sized in Martin terms somewhere between an OM and a dreadnought, 15.5 inches wide in the lower bout and 4.15 inches deep, with rounded cutaways.

The neck profile isn't a million miles from a mid- to late- 50s Gibson... an ample hand-filler, not a zoomy race track

The Paul Reed Smith electric-guitar connection is pushed firmly home via the company's famous spiky cornered headstock and the trademark bird inlays flapping their way from the third fret to the 19th.

The standard of fit and finish is good. These guitars are gloss all over, and while they do have a slightly plasticky look and feel, the finish is thin enough on the tops to let a hint of grain texture show through. The body binding is simple black plastic; we've lost the neck and headstock binding from before and the rosettes are now three-banders instead of wide single bands.

Otherwise, these Angeli are just as attractive-looking as their forebears were – and they're performance-ready, too. The old electro models had preamps with full EQ situated on the upper bout, but these have simple volume and tone wheels hidden inside the soundhole, as well as a second strap button on the heel.

The previous PRS SE acoustics had solid tops and backs, but laminated sides. The new A20E and A30E retain their solid spruce tops, but are otherwise all-laminated. The A20E is mahogany – a stripy example that's been left almost unstained for a natural, golden look – while the A30E is rosewood. Both guitars have mahogany necks with stacked heels and grafted headstocks, but where the A20E has a rosewood fingerboard matched

with a rosewood bridge, the A30E substitutes ebony and adds an ebony headstock facing.

While we're examining this end, it's worth noticing the raised gold 'SE Angelus' legends and the sealed chrome PRS-branded tuners, which are nice and smooth. The nuts are real bone, as are the compensated saddles. That's a quality touch at this price, although the A20E's plastic bridge pins have enough sharp flashing left over from the moulding process to do quite some damage to your hand, which doesn't make an ideal first impression. The second thing you'll notice is these guitars are slightly on the heavy side; the mahogany model weighs a little more than the rosewood one.

In use

The necks of the A20E and A30E buck current acoustic trends slightly in terms of nut width: 42mm is very much an electric-style measurement, and most of the competitors for these guitars choose a roomier, more fingerpicking-suited 45mm or 1.75 inches. In terms of feel, they're slightly chubby in the shoulder. In a way, it's a profile not a million miles away from that of a mid- to late-50s Gibson... an ample hand-filler rather than a zoomy race track. We find these necks a bit of an effort for thumb-over styles in the lower positions, but for others (and, okay, those with correct technique), they'll feel good to play.

PRS acoustics have always been different on the inside as well as the outside. The X-bracing-meets-fan-bracing construction gives the Private Stock acoustics a unique sound which, when brand new, is very open and responsive. These two are also open-sounding right out of the box.

The backs and sides may be laminated, but the contrast between mahogany and rosewood is noticeable; there's more brashness and edge to the A20E, with an emptier, hollower midrange, while the A30E is darker and more polished... overall, for us, it's a more satisfying sound, though for certain styles, the spanky A20E definitely has its charms.

Both are fairly bright and quick-speaking and well-balanced across the strings until you reach the sixth (bottom E) string, which lacks a little weight and authority on both guitars. For fingerpicking, they're dynamic and expressive; with a pick, the A20E is slightly less effective, although it does reward artful single-note work. Good sustain on both is particularly noticeable, although they're not the loudest guitars of this size we've played. Overall, the mahogany A20E lacks the tonal solidity we'd look for in a classic strummer, coming over more as pretty and new-age-y, but it suits bare fingers nicely. The A30E is the smoother, posher-sounding one – and while it may not replicate the tone of its US-made PRS sisters, you have to remember that it's a tenth of the price.

We also need to mention the electronics: the SEs combine an undersaddle transducer with an endpoint jack, soundhole wheels and a battery velcro'd to the endblock, so swapping that will best be done during string changes. In use, it sounds very much like a typical UST, but with decent balance and no problems to report.

At these asking prices, the new PRS SE electros really have to deliver, and they're definitely up against it – particularly as, as you can see on the opposite page, the competition either comes similarly-spec'd for less, or armed with solid woods throughout at about the same price. That's a steep hill for any guitar to scale. We do think the A20E and A30E acquit themselves reasonably well, however. The chunky neck profiles and the X-meets-Torres bracing do make for a different flavour – and a different flavour is always a good thing.

KEY FEATURES

PRS SE Angelus A20E

- **PRICE** £895 inc hard-shell case
- **DESCRIPTION** Cutaway electro-acoustic. Made in Korea
- **BUILD** Solid spruce top with X/classical bracing, laminated mahogany back and sides, single-bound top, back and neck, mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard with birds inlays, rosewood bridge, PRS enclosed chrome tuners, bone nut and saddle
- **ELECTRICS** undersaddle pickup with vol/tone in soundhole
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.25"/640mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 24.3mm at 10th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.75lb/2.15kg
- **FINISH** Gloss all over
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **CONTACT** www.prsguitarseurope.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Good build quality
+ An alternative sonic signature
+ Discreet soundhole controls

- Sounds slightly thin
- No onboard EQ or tuner
- Battery not speedily accessible

You certainly get decent build quality from this mid/high priced Korean electro-acoustic, but the tone and the neck profile won't be for everyone

7/10

KEY FEATURES

PRS SE Angelus A30E

- **PRICE** £1,000 inc hard-shell case
- **DESCRIPTION** Cutaway electro-acoustic. Made in Korea
- **BUILD** Solid spruce top with X/classical bracing, laminated rosewood back and sides, single-bound top, back and neck, mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard with birds inlays, ebony bridge, PRS enclosed chrome tuners, ebony-faced headstock, bone nut and saddle
- **ELECTRICS** undersaddle pickup with vol/tone in soundhole
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.25"/640mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 24.3mm at 10th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.74lb/2.15kg
- **FINISH** Gloss all over
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Very fair sound
+ Decent build quality
+ Discreet soundhole controls

- Nearly at an all-solid woods price
- No onboard EQ or tuner

This model is more expensive, but as well as being better-looking, the rosewood adds an element of richness and depth, making it a superior all-rounder

8/10

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ECC83-S	20 Pcs	£6.60 Each	6L6GC	16 Pcs	£12.72 Each
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ECC83-S	£16.80	£20.70	6L6GC-S	£24.00	£26.40
EL34-M	£19.20	£21.60	6V6GT-R	£19.20	£21.60
EL84-S	£14.40	£16.80	6V6GT-S	£24.00	£26.40

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Manuel Rodríguez Model A

If you're an improving classical student on the lookout for a capable sidekick, **RICK BATEY** reckons the Model A could be a winner

Manuel Rodríguez is a well-known name for mass-market classical guitars. Its instruments are distributed by JHS in the UK and sold in Guitar Center in the US, and range in price from £349 all the way up to £1,999; and although some lesser Rodríguez guitars used to be built in China, today, all production has come back home to the company's factory in Esquivias in the Toledo region of Spain, south of Madrid.

The Model is no modern 'crossover' guitar but a traditional, wide-necked, non-electro classical. For players of this type of guitar, the argument over the relative merits of spruce and cedar will never cease – but the Model A has plumped for a top of solid cedar and laminated rosewood back and sides. The back and sides don't come close to matching in colour, but the trimmings do their level best to make up for it, with real rosewood binding with maple side-lines and red-stained maple top purfling, and a soundhole rosette in a cheerful mosaic of red and green.

Peek inside and you'll see this guitar is built with a traditional slipper-style Spanish heel block, which is great to see. The neck itself is sapele, not very straight-grained; the flat fingerboard is not ebony, but sandy-coloured rosewood. With only 45kg of string tension, of course, there's no need for a truss rod here, and Rodriguez guitars use ebony inserts beneath the fingerboard to add stiffness. The tuners have plastic pearl buttons, while the nut is an unusual design with little raised semi-circles dividing the strings, which all lie on the same flat surface – a neat way of achieving an even string height, although any height adjustments will mean removing material from the bottom of the saddle instead of deepening the string slots, as there aren't any. At the other end, the glossy lacquered bridge carries a real bone saddle. Overall, the Model A looks sturdily built inside and out, but there's some white lacquer buildup where the neck meets the sides and, overall, the finish may be too thick for best tone and maximum projection.

A balanced and quite toneful guitar which, with a little tweaking, would serve a student well for several years

In use

The Model A's flat-backed neck and 52mm nut gives us the standard classical handful, and it's a decent player with very acceptable intonation, though we'd prefer a fractionally lower string height at the nut. Tuning is also decent, though the supplied strings never seemed to truly settle in like a quality set should. As for the sound, it's likeable – not huge in scale, granted, but warm enough, with a nice, sonorous low end and smooth trebles. The sound doesn't explode out of the guitar, but it's well balanced across the strings, and this guitar is certainly capable of sounding subtle and musical.

This, then, is a reasonably toneful guitar which, with a little tweaking, would serve a student well for several years. It's possible to find quite high-quality, all-solid used 'student' concert guitars for less than this, but if you prefer to skirt the minefields of the secondhand market then Rodríguez is a familiar name that will get you started, and makes a good deal of sense... at least in its lower ranges.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Solid cedar top
+ Looks the part
+ Well-known name

- Finish is rather thick
- Laminated back/sides
- Action could use a tweak

£700 seems a tad hefty, but the Model A is a respectable option for an 'improving student'-level player or for a casual nylon-string picker. Classicals are all about tone, tone, tone and personal preference, so get out and try some

6/10

KEY FEATURES

Manuel Rodríguez Model A

- **PRICE** £699, case not included
- **DESCRIPTION** Nylon-string classical guitar. Made in Spain
- **BUILD** Solid Canadian cedar top with fan bracing, laminated rosewood back and sides, sapele neck, rosewood fingerboard and headstock facing, inlaid rosewood bridge. Rosewood and maple binding, multicoloured mosaic soundhole rosette. Chrome/plastic tuners, bone saddle, bone nut
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 52mm at nut, 62mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 25mm at 10th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 49mm at nut, 59mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.65lb/1.65kg
- **FINISH** Gloss all over
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **CONTACT** JHS 0113 286 5381 **www.jhs.co.uk**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

The Alhambra 7P £595 is a solid cedar/laminated rosewood concert model with an ebony 'board. Also look at makers such as **Camps**: the solid cedar/solid rosewood **SP6 £649** has a good reputation, as does the **Raimundo 146 £995**, a trad classical with solid rosewood back and sides

REVERB SHOOTOUT

TEST CONDITIONS

In order to make this reverb stompbox shootout as real-world as possible, we compared all three units extensively in band rehearsal room scenarios in mono in front of, and in the effects loop of, a stock Fender Hot Rod Deluxe combo. All three units have plenty to shout about in the context of a stereo rig – visit the manufacturers' websites for more.

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Empress Reverb, Strymon BigSky & Eventide Space

In search of the ultimate digital reverb pedal? **GARY WALKER** pits two established heavyweights against a new challenger from Empress

For several years, guitarists looking for the ultimate digital reverb pedal have, broadly speaking, been drawn to one of two camps. Providing you can afford to spend the equivalent cost of a well-used family car on a single stompbox, you're either Strymon or Eventide. Eventide struck first with the Space, released in 2011 and crammed full of high-quality effects from the company's H8000FW and Eclipse V4 rack processors. The Strymon BigSky, made by the people behind the Damage Control brand and hailing from Westlake Village, California, emerged from the blue corner two years later.

The Big Two's dominance is under threat, however, from a pretender to the ambient throne. Led by electrical engineer Steve Bragg, Canadian brand Empress Effects launched its simply titled Reverb pedal last year, with 24 algorithms, vivid sounds and simple usability. It's seconds out as *G&B* puts all three units through their paces and crowns the reverb champ...

Usability

All three pedals offer buffered or true bypass, MIDI connectivity, tap tempo and an expression pedal input.

The smallest of the trio, the Empress has 12 reverb types, each with sub-modes reached simply by turning the Mode dial – a small LED shines blue, red, yellow or green to indicate which setting is engaged.

The Empress has the fewest presets – 35, although you can expand on those via firmware updates using an SD card. There are two modes for preset selection – Scrolling and Bank, with the latter working in the same way as the BigSky – press the right and middle switches to bank up, left and middle to bank down. The Space's operation is simpler still: the middle and right switches scroll up and down, and left selects the preset. Where the simple layout of the Empress loses points is due to the lack of a digital display. Remembering what bank you're in, or what parameter its Thing 1 and Thing 2 controls relate to during the heat of live use can be confusing.

The Space wins big here, looking like a device from a 1980s sci-fi film, with an impossible-to-miss, bright-red LED screen across the middle of the unit, and 100 appropriately named presets, including some from artists such as Sigur Ros. The learning curve, however, is as steep as the manual is vast.

The BigSky has a staggering 300 presets, with an understated display above the Type dial that shows simply the number of the bank you're in or any parameter you begin to edit. Pressing down the Type knob reveals a range of sub-menus with mind-boggling options. As all three units are digital pedals, the knob positions don't correspond to the current values of the preset. So, for example, if you switch to a Hall preset which has minimal decay, but previously the Decay knob had been at max, when you attempt to tweak the decay, you will begin from the point of 100 per cent, causing a disconcerting jump. The Space has a clever solution here – the Catchup feature, which means that turning the knob has no effect until you reach the point the preset is set at.

Traditional sounds

Explaining each pedal's plethora of modes would stretch to dissertation length, so we'll focus on three here – Spring, Plate and Hall. The Empress has three Spring sub-modes, but far fewer tweakable paremeters than the other two. The Bright setting is an emulation of a Fender Twin Reverb, and it's arguably the pick of the three pedals. It also has Dark – a Fender Deluxe emulation – and Overdrive, a cool idea that gets rather nasal with our Fender Hot Rod Deluxe after 2pm on the Mix control. Compared to the Hot Rod's onboard analogue spring reverb, in Dark mode the Empress sounds wetter and a little less defined.

The BigSky held its own against the Hot Rod, and then some. With the decay and mix up above noon, it's a big, natural-sounding splashy spring. It goes deep, too, with low-end and pre-delay controls and the ability to select the number of springs – from 1 to 3. Each time you add a spring, you hear a subtle noise a little like the sound of a spring-reverb tank vibrating. Nice. Under the Dwell sub-menu, we get the option to switch between Clean, Combo, Tube and Overdrive. The Overdrive mode is voiced better than on the Empress, sounding a little like the gritty preamp of a tape delay.

The Space offers even more room for adjustment, with not only the number of springs to the decimal point(!), but also spring tension, tremolo speed and interval and resonance controls – Eventide's attention to detail is staggering. >

However, for our money, the BigSky sounds just a little richer and more appealing than the Space, and offers more versatility than the Empress.

In Plate mode, the Empress again delivers highly realistic, high-quality results, with two settings: Classic – modelled on the EMT 140 reverb unit – and Studio. There's control over the pre-delay time and early reflection level, and it sounds clear and present.

The BigSky sounds deliciously 3D and wide for classic, low-decay plate sounds. The accepted wisdom that this is a pedal only for 'artificial' sounds beloved of offset-toting hipsters is short-sighted – it does 'traditional' very well, too. Again, the Space has more controls to play with: Diffusion, Distance, High and Lo Damping, as well as the usual tone and mod controls. In this mode, all three pedals do a great job of creating massive ambient washes for tremolo picking with the Decay cranked and a helping of external fuzz, with the Empress and BigSky sounding slightly wider and more lush. A pattern is emerging, then – the BigSky and Empress fight it out for the sweetest, most well-rounded sound, while the Space gives greater scope to delve under the hood.

Hall mode is tough to call. The Space wins for the sheer depth of its editability. Its decay rises to Infinite, and then Freeze, making epic post-rock atmospherics a piece of cake to dial in, with separate controls for the low and high end of the decay. However, the BigSky – which has two preset sizes: Concert and Arena, and just a Decay control – has an enchanting, intangible sonic sweetness. With the Decay up near maximum and the Mix at around 1pm, the balance when playing arpeggiated chords or palm-muted notes to the huge wash beneath is perfection.

We're really impressed by the Empress here, too, and it pushes the BigSky hard for the best, most 'realistic' hall sound. Its two modes: Concert – a large hall based on the modulation characteristics of the Lexicon 224XL with a long decay, and Modern – smoother with long tails with no modulation that sounds beautiful with plenty of decay – are right on the money. The Early Reflection Level control housed in Thing 2 is a neat addition, enabling you to dictate how soon the atmospherics cloak your sound.

The Cloud mode is the jewel in the BigSky's crown, sprinkling everything you play with majestic glitter

Ambient effects

Moving into ambient territory, the BigSky and Space start to pull into the lead. The Cloud mode is the jewel in the BigSky's brushed-blue crown. Shrouding everything you play in a majestic glitter, it sounds utterly beautiful without getting intrusive – especially with the Freeze control activated. Into a decent clean valve amp with a good boost pedal and a smidgen of tape delay to rough things up a bit, it's this reviewer's Holy Grail tone. If Cloud's voluminous ambience becomes too much, the Bloom mode, where the envelope builds slowly, affecting the trails gradually, ensures individual notes remain clear and distinct. Swell, too, is jaw-droppingly good. Open chords played with fingers, or picked notes high up the neck become huge swathes of rising noise. The Chorale setting accompanies your playing with an ensemble of human voices, with adjustability of the vowel shapes, depending on whether you're an "oooh" or an "aaah" man or woman – or an "ooohaaah"...

Magneto does a nice impression of a tape echo, with up to six heads, and the Pre-delay knob acting as a feedback control. It sounds gorgeous and means you could feasibly get by without a delay pedal on your board. Nonlinear, meanwhile, gives you a choice of inventive backwards sounds: Swoosh, Reverse, Ramp, Gate, Gauss and Bounce modes opening the door to all sorts of psychedelic sounds.

The Empress has a mode similar to Cloud – Ghost, which sounds glorious, although it's voiced differently; as you push the decay further, that becomes more apparent, with the modulated resonance becoming a spooky alien wind.

G&B's favourite mode on the Empress is Delay+Reverb – a very usable digital delay with three modes that can do everything from dotted eighth notes to huge ambient sounds and, with the Feedback at max, self-oscillation. The lack of a screen is a disadvantage when dialling in delay speeds, but the Blendable Delay mode has that covered, with the Select switch doubling as a tap tempo. Filtered Feedback Delay applies a high and low filter to the feedback of the repeats, and is a highly characterful effect that we got lost playing little arpeggios and lead parts with for hours.

The Lo-Fi 50s Radio mode is a really fun, crunchy overdriven AM radio effect that Dan Auerbach would surely approve of. The pitch-shifted Sparkle mode – equivalent to BigSky's Shimmer – sounds lovely, and with the Decay up full and the Mix at less than halfway, we get coruscating infinite reverb drones that you can play over with your original tone remaining distinct. However, with only controls for the Sparkle level and length, the pitch-shifting options offered by the Empress are fewer than on the BigSky or Space.

Modulation covers modulation, chorus and flange, with tremolo being added in a later firmware update. The trem is the effect we'd use most often, so it's slightly frustrating that it wasn't included in the original featureset. Beer

The Space's 12 algorithms and 100 presets are reached by turning and pressing the Preset knob

The brightly lit central screen displays the reverb type and preset name, or any parameter that you're editing

Xnob and Ynob control different parameters for each reverb type

The HotSwitch can be used to change a parameter within a preset – for example, instantly turning the Decay to max. Very handy for live use

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

BEST FOR Sonic exploration

mode, slightly disappointingly, is an umbrella term for modes that don't fit into any of the other categories.

Ambient Swell offers two modes – Triggered Swell, where the note is faded in, in relation to the attack of your picking, and Gate Swell With Octave. Turning up the Mix to full results in mournful volume swells, although we needed to back off our guitar's volume to stop things getting overly boomy and, all things considered, we preferred using a Hall setting and employing a volume pedal.

There's far more to the Empress than its simple interface suggests. It's one of the best pedals of any type we've played in recent times, but the analogue feel, fewer parameters to tweak and lack of display handicaps it against the other contenders in this shootout, especially when you take the similar pricing into account.

So, the Empress is pipped to the post by the BigSky's slightly sweeter, more widescreen sounds and its deeper functionality, but can the Space take the crown? If the number of ambient effects on offer is a deal-breaker, then yes, it's a clear winner.

Its epic BlackHole setting, which houses the foreboding Cigaroos preset, produces huge, otherworldly noises with trem-like throb and delay into the bargain. It's a phenomenally creative effect that's further out there than anything on either of the other two pedals, with additional Gravity/Inv Gravity, Feedback and Resonance controls. With a violin bow or EBow it sounds immense. ModEchoVerb gives you a wide range of modulation effects, with the FxMix knob moving between SwptVerb, Flange and Chorus – we love the SolarDelay preset for subtle echo-flavoured lead playing. Equally, the Reverse mode's Continuum setting offers kaleidoscopic reversed repeats. DualVerb is a cool mode that pairs two reverbs with independent controls. Throw in the ability to use the HotSwitch to max out the decay on either one, and the use of the combination of the X and Y and FxMix knobs to alter the decay, pre-delay and ratio of the A and B reverbs. It's mind-bendingly complex stuff.

MangledVerb applies overdrive to the trails, from a soft clip to fizzy high gain, with the Ynob controlling the output of the overdrive from -18dB up to 6dB. With the addition of the FxMix knob for wobble, it's possible to get something like scuzzy, lo-fi tape delay. TremoloVerb is another big win for the Space, with triangle, peak, random, ramp, sine and square shapes. Just engage the Splitter preset, feed in some fuzz and prepare to grin like a fool! We could go on. This is an absurdly in-depth pedal that's way more than a reverb unit – it's a multi-effects machine par excellence. Despite this, we just can't look past the sheer ethereal tonal beauty of the BigSky – and for that reason, it's our overall winner.

KEY FEATURES

Empress Reverb

- **PRICE** £459
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal with 24 algorithms in 12 types, 35 presets & SD card for firmware update; true or buffered bypass; cab sim; 48kHz sampling, with 24-bit conversion and 32-bit internal processing; universal control port for expression pedal, USB & MIDI; powered by 9V DC adaptor. Made in Canada
- **CONTROLS** Mode, Decay, Mix, Output, Low, Hi, Thing 1, Thing 2, tap switch for tempo or infinite reverb; Select, Scroll, Save and Bypass switches
- **MODES** Hall, Plate, Spring, Room, Sparkle, Modulation, Ambient Swell, Delay+Reverb, Reverse, Ghost, Lo-Fi, Beer
- **DIMENSIONS** 144x95x44mm
- **CONTACT** www.empresseffects.com First Line Distribution, 01626 853019

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Wide range of realistic sounds
+ Straightforward usability
+ Firmware updates via SD card

– Despite its simplicity, the lack of a display can make live use complicated

Its range of realistic sounds defies its simple interface. If it were £100 cheaper, it would be on our board

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Strymon BigSky

- **PRICE** £479
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal with 12 algorithms and 300 presets; stereo ins & outs; infinite sustain, freeze, spillover and reverb persist; LCD display; cab sim; true or buffered bypass; +/-3db boost/cut; powered by 9V DC adaptor. MIDI connectivity. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Type, Decay, Pre-delay, Mix, Tone, Mod, Param 1 & Param 2 controls; Cab Emulator switch; A, B & C preset switches
- **MODES** Room, Hall, Spring, Plate, Swell, Bloom, Cloud, Chorale, Shimmer, Magneto, Nonlinear, Reflections
- **DIMENSIONS** 171x130x44.5mm
- **CONTACT** www.strymon.net MusicPsych, 0207 607 6005

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Vast functionality
+ Sounds absolutely beautiful
+ Huge range of presets

– Like the other two, the weak pound means it'll cost you nigh-on £500

It does traditional sounds as well as out-there ambient effects, and sounds utterly stunning – even at this price

10/10

KEY FEATURES

Eventide Space

- **PRICE** £490
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal with 12 algorithms & 100 presets, including artist selections; tap tempo and MIDI clock sync/generate; USB port; true or buffered bypass; powered by 9V DC adaptor. Assembled in China
- **CONTROLS** Mix, Decay, Size, Delay, EQ Low & High, Preset, Xnob, Ynob, FxMix, Contour; Active, HotSwitch & Type switches
- **MODES** Room, Plate, Hall, Spring, Blackhole, Shimmer, Reverse Reverb, ModEchoVerb, DualVerb, MangledVerb, DynaVerb, TremoloVerb
- **DIMENSIONS** 190x122x54mm
- **CONTACT** www.eventideaudio.com Source Distribution, 020 8962 5080

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Hugely creative and inspiring
+ Massive scope for tweaking
+ Does way more than reverb

– Complex to master

It may not quite match the BigSky's sonic majesty, but for experimental players in search of a bottomless range of out-there sounds, it's the one

9/10

D'Angelico Electrozinc electric guitar strings

D'Angelico and D'Addario have teamed up to re-introduce the legendary Electrozinc electric guitar strings. **HUW PRICE** winds things up

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The bottom line is that if you want to try a set of zinc-plated round-core electric strings, the D'Angelico Electrozincs are the only thing out there. Half round/ground roundwound alternatives include **GHS Brite Flats £16** and **D'Addario stainless steel Half Rounds £14**

Thankfully, the relic'ing craze hasn't yet extended to artificially corroded strings. However, retro strings with recently revived alloys are beginning to make an impact. For instance, monel has reappeared on Martin Retro strings, and now D'Angelico has teamed up with D'Addario to design and engineer these new Electrozinc sets.

In 1938, renowned luthier John D'Angelico met a young John D'Addario, who was busy expanding his family's string business. Together, they devised what some regard as the world's first modern round-wound electric guitar string, using steel plated with zinc in a process known as Bethanization. They remained in production until the Bethlehem Steel Corporation plant that made the raw materials ceased production in the 1960s.

The D'Angelico brand was revived some time ago, and the planets have aligned for it to team up with D'Addario once again to resume production using the original materials with round cores and the addition of D'Addario's EXP coatings for added corrosion resistance.

The packaging will leave you in no doubt that these are premium strings. Art Deco motifs abound and the tension measurements for each string are provided in imperial and metric. Six gauges are available across the range – three jazz and three rock – and we were provided with two 10-gauge sets, one set featuring heavier strings (besides the top E) and a wound G.

The D'Angelico brand was revived some time ago and the planets have aligned for it to team up with D'Addario once again

We decided to make this a 'chalk and cheese' test by using our most diverse guitars – an old Gibson ES-330 with a P-90 and a '54 replica Strat with a set of low-wind Shed Vintage 54 pickups. As with all round-core strings, care has to be taken to tune them up to concert pitch before trimming off the excess string length because the windings can unravel and the string will go dead before you have even played a note.

With the conventional post holes on the ES-330 tuners, this is straightforward. However, the Strat tuners have drilled post holes designed for the strings to be trimmed to length and pushed down the shaft before being wrapped. Instead, you can simply pass the string through the slot across the top of the post and wrap it around once over the top of the protruding string, then continue the windings down the post as usual. Of course, the plain strings can be loaded in the usual way.

Fresh strings with a dull grey appearance, that sound slightly darker than the set they're replacing, is a first for us. For the record, the old sets were pure nickel Ernie Ball Rock N Rolls that were at the very least two months old. The wound G and plain G sets went on the ES-330 and the Strat respectively.

On the ES-330, the D'Angelicos provide a smoother and more slippery feel – almost as though the wound strings had a coating of machine oil. Acoustically, the tone is fuller and more solid. Plugged in, the ES-330 sounds more powerful and smoother with an enhanced sense of woodiness. While the string-to-string balance is very even across the wound strings, the B string sounds slightly louder than the G. This is particularly evident with the neck pickup selected.

With the Strat, the effect of the D'Angelico strings is transformative. A big and bold sound with softened high-end attack on the wound strings

With the Strat, the effect of the D'Angelico strings is utterly transformative. Although this reviewer has limited experience of half-round strings, the tone of the Electrozincs is close to what we imagine them to be. It's a big and bold sound with softened high-end attack on the wound strings but plenty of weight and a hint of flatwound twang. The feel is somewhat slippery and the D'Angelicos seem as if they sit a fraction higher in the nut slots. Think muscular and old-school. Although it's a little too early to report on their longevity, zinc coating is a well-proven corrosion preventative, as evidenced by countless galvanised watering cans, buckets and Porsche 911s. They settle in very quickly, and after a quick stretch we had no tuning issues. If you want to tame the treble of a bright-sounding guitar or ramp up the jazziness of a semi without compromising playability, these D'Angelico strings are well worth trying.

KEY FEATURES

D'Angelico Electrozinc strings

- **PRICE** £11 (rock) £12 (jazz)
- **DESCRIPTION** Electric guitar strings, manufactured in USA by D'Addario
- **BUILD** EXP-coated zinc-plated Bethanized steel winding with round core
- **CONTACT** Face +32 3 844 67 97 **www.dangelicoguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Full and fat tone
+ Quick to settle down
+ Smooth sound

- Rolled-off treble
- Slightly stiff feel

Look elsewhere for fresh-string shimmer and brightness but for fatter, smoother and jazzier tones the Electrozincs deliver the goods

8/10

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TONY BACON

Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians, and music. More info at tonybacon.co.uk. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *The Gibson 335 Guitar Book*, and *The Ibanez Electric Guitar Book*, and his latest is *The Bass Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of the electric bass guitar.

THE MAN WHO INVENTED BASS

TONY BACON remembers his two encounters with Leo Fender – the man who conceived the modern solidbody electric bass guitar

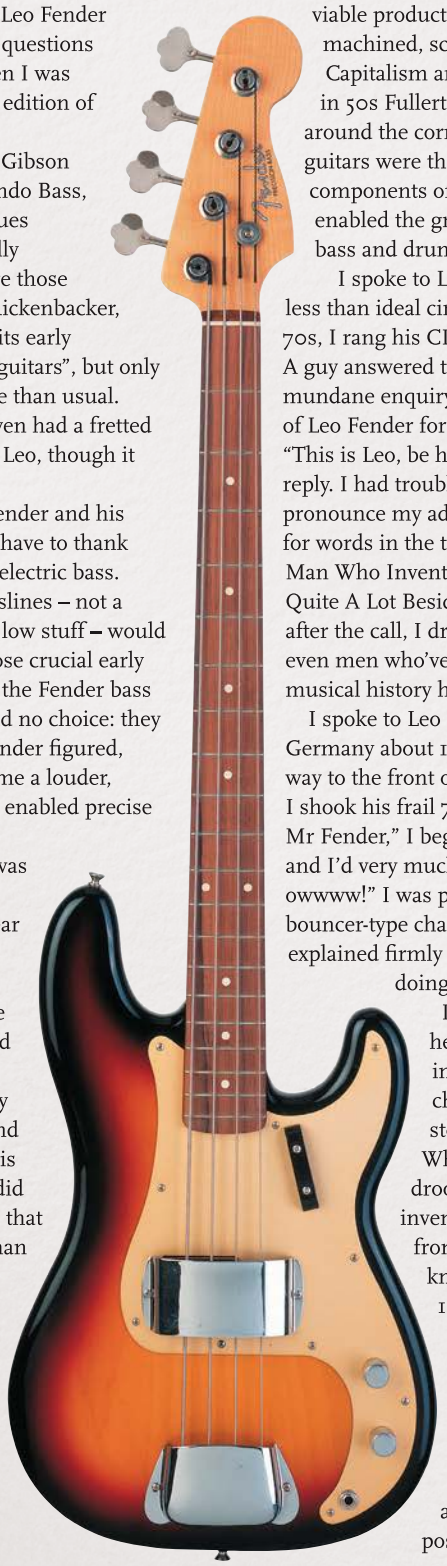
Surely someone else would have invented the electric bass guitar if Leo Fender hadn't? That's one of the questions I asked myself again when I was putting together the new edition of *The Bass Book*.

There were earlier pointers. Gibson had its big acoustic fretted Mando Bass, sometimes pictured in catalogues being played almost horizontally rather than upright. There were those stick-like electric uprights by Rickenbacker, Vega and Regal. Martin called its early dreadnought six-strings "bass guitars", but only because they had a bassier tone than usual. And Paul Tutmarc in Seattle even had a fretted electric bass guitar well before Leo, though it made no commercial impact.

Without question, it's Leo Fender and his small team of conspirators we have to thank for the present-day idea of the electric bass. Without them, no modern basslines – not a single bass-clef note of today's low stuff – would have been possible without those crucial early rumblings in California. Until the Fender bass came along, bassists largely had no choice: they used a big acoustic upright. Fender figured, quite rightly, that they'd welcome a louder, more portable instrument that enabled precise pitching of notes.

The Fender Precision Bass was launched late in 1951 and was improved gradually: reverse-gear tuners became conventional ones; pickups were enhanced; bodies were contoured. But the overall blueprints have survived into today's Precision and Jazz derivatives, whether or not they have Fender logos on them. And Leo did not stop innovating. His StingRay bass for Music Man did much to persuade 70s bassists that active electronics were more than a mere gimmick. This model, too, lives on today.

Leo never played an instrument. His interest in electronics grew from a boyhood fascination with radios. What he and his team certainly did have was a great ability to listen to what players wanted, and to adapt those needs into mass-produced and commercially viable products. Guitar parts were fabricated, machined, screwed down, bolted together. Capitalism and the guitar joined hands in 50s Fullerton, and rock 'n' roll was just around the corner. By the early 60s, bass guitars were there and waiting, new and vital components of modern music-making that enabled the great pop line-up of two guitars, bass and drums.



I spoke to Leo on two occasions, both in less than ideal circumstances. Back in the late 70s, I rang his CLF Research firm in Fullerton. A guy answered the phone, and I made my mundane enquiry: could I have some photos of Leo Fender for a British magazine feature? "This is Leo, be happy to oblige," came the reply. I had trouble after that. I managed to pronounce my address but was otherwise lost for words in the telephonic presence of The Man Who Invented The Bass Guitar And Quite A Lot Besides. When I'd calmed down after the call, I drew comfort from the fact that even men who've helped change the course of musical history have to answer the phone.

I spoke to Leo again at a trade show in Germany about 10 years later, after pushing my way to the front of a crowd at the G&L stand. I shook his frail 78-year-old hand. "Excuse me Mr Fender," I began, "I'm a British journalist and I'd very much like to interview you for... owwww!" I was pulled away from Leo by a bouncer-type chap in a satin tour jacket. He explained firmly that Mr Fender would not be doing interviews.

It was obvious Leo was in ill health (he died a few years later, in 1991). I only wanted a quiet chat. I'd have asked what was in store for his G&L company. What it felt like among the 80s droopy-headstock progeny of his inventions. How it felt to be yards from the vast Fender stand, knowing he'd sold his name in 1965 for a dishful of dollars. I'd have had a few more quotes for *The Bass Book*, but I never got the chance. I would have ended by saying, 'Thank you Leo, from bass players everywhere: you and your pals made everything possible.' That's all.

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TECH SUPPORT

Every great guitarist needs a great tech, and Alan Rogan is one of the best. **SID BISHOP** catches up with his old pal...

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

Let's assume you've been learning to play guitar for several years with a near-religious devotion, and you've actually managed to get pretty good. Unfortunately, there's been a price to pay, and your hermit-like existence has made strangers of your family and driven away all of your friends, but the sacrifices have paid off as you've now nailed (almost) all of Joe Bonamassa's trickiest chops.

However, you've had to face up to the reality that performing to a live audience fills you with terror. I've encountered several such people over the years, such as the bass player I had who would tremble, turn pale, then throw up two minutes before going on stage; and the singer who would find a corner to hide in, once or twice even sneaking out of the venue and going home. I will never forget the guitarist I worked with who played two entire sets standing behind his Marshall stack.

To be a good performer, you must be something of an extrovert, with a sizeable ego and a confident state of mind. Not everyone is so blessed, and you might be relieved to discover there is a way you can make use of your skills, be involved in this exciting and rewarding business and be surrounded by gorgeous guitars all day, but without enduring the gut-wrenching stress of appearing before crowds of people. You could get a job as a guitar technician for one of the leading lights, and spend your time anonymously in the background, tuning, adjusting and setting up their instruments. You'd also get to tour the world and make some pretty good money.

Most well-known players have neither the time nor the inclination to change their own strings, let alone take care of the intonation, truss-rod adjustments or a fret dress. It's much more convenient to pay somebody else to do it.

Alan Rogan is one of the best techs in the business, and I've been fortunate to count him as a friend for over 40 years. Alan has worked for Eric Clapton, Ronnie Wood, Keith Richards, Cat Stevens, Jackson Browne, AC/DC, CSNY and Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers. Most notable is his work for The Who. He's been Pete Townshend's guitar tech since the mid 70s, a position he still holds today. Alan's undeniably at the top of the game, and I caught up with him following his return from the most recent Who tour of America.

Explaining his vital role in Townshend's camp, he says: "I'm responsible for the setting up and maintenance of Pete's guitars, and ensuring that all of his instruments are ready for use at very short notice. He generally takes 16 guitars on tour, there is always a spare to hand, and, as I've discovered by bitter experience, a spare for the spare.

"It's also my job to purchase any new guitars that Pete might require. Other than his Gibson J-200, it's almost all Strats these days – the SG Specials and Les Paul Deluxes of old having long been retired. If Pete tells me that the action is too high or low, even mid-show, I can resolve such issues in as little as a minute, thanks to the Strat's Micro-Tilt feature. Any serious repairs are in due course carried out by Gordon Wells.

"For The Who, the days of flying from gig to gig are in the past, and we travel by road nowadays. An early start is essential, especially for the lighting and PA guys, who will be at the venue by 7am to start rigging. The production crew arrive a couple of hours later, and the backline crew (including me) are on site by 10 or 11am. The personnel who do all the heavy pushing and lifting are recruited locally.

Alan Rogan has been Pete Townshend's guitar tech since the mid-70s

"I get all the guitars off the truck, locate a work area and start setting up and tuning. By the time the soundcheck is due, usually late afternoon, I will have everything set to go. If the weather changes and a sudden climate variation occurs, some hurried multiple truss-rod adjusting might be necessary.

"New strings are fitted at every gig, though usually only to the main couple of guitars. Surprising as it might seem, Pete is very easy-going on strings, and never breaks one. He uses two or three different tunings in live shows, but equipped with my trusty Peterson SC5000 tuner this presents no problems. Once all his amps are on stage and tested, and the guitars are in tune and checked, that night's performance can commence. Hopefully, nothing will go wrong, but I'm always there, off to stage left, another guitar in hand. At the end of the night, it's time to pack everything away and drive to the next one, and basically that's my life."

Having read Alan's words, you may feel that being a guitar tech could be a desirable career path to follow. It's immediately evident on meeting Alan that he loves his job, and will continue to do it for as long as he can stand upright. In that respect, he's a fortunate individual, and I am also in awe of his stamina. The guitar tech's life is not an easy one – and I doubt if I'd be up to it.

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH Reverb

Vintage TIME MACHINES

1965 BURNS BALDWIN GB 65

This shortlived model was one of Jim Burns' final creations before the company was bought out. It's a mid-60s beauty

This Burns Baldwin GB 65 is a true piece of guitar history. Not only did it pioneer the thinline, fully-hollow, flat-topped acoustic-electric concept seen today in the form of guitars such as the Taylor T5 Series, but it represented one of the final proud efforts of Jim Burns before his company was bought out.

Production of the GB 65 started in 1965, just as the Baldwin Piano Company rebounded from its failed bid to buy Fender by purchasing Burns for just over £300,000 (Fender was purchased for $13 million by CBS). The model lasted just over a year, as production ended in 1966.

This particular specimen (serial no. 9341) is in fantastic condition, one of very few ever produced – it may be the first one we've seen on Reverb.com. The 'Handcrafted by Burns' label on the pickguard seems ironic now, as that would be true for only a handful of months. But the flamed-maple top, thinline mahogany body and flat-top electro-acoustic design is timeless.

Two Rez-o-Matik pickups – somewhat Fender-ish in their clear and bright articulation – are paired with a single volume and single tone knob. The fully-hollow mahogany body has significant bracing that was marked as a 'controlled resonance' design, something that prevented an overly fat and boomy sound that sometimes plagues fully-hollow electric guitars.

We miss the days of appointments such as the 'phalange bone' f-holes, ornamental 'B' logo trapeze tailpiece, and creative knob control plates. The zero-fret dates the guitar somewhat, but we'd love to get our hands on the 25.5-inch scale length neck and see how it feels.

The concept for the flat-top hollow-bodied GB 65 lived on in the more familiar Baldwin Virginian/Model 550 – albeit with a single round soundhole in the middle – through til 1970.

This model seems to fetch consistently higher prices in the UK than in the US; one to chalk it up to home-nation sentimentality, perhaps?

VITAL STATISTICS

1965 Burns Baldwin GB 65

- **PRICE** £2,110
- **YEAR** 1965
- **TYPE** Semi-hollow guitar
- **BUILD** Flat-top in Natural finish
- **REVERB SELLER** New Kings Road Vintage Guitar Emporium Reverb.com/new-kings-road
- **SEE MORE** Reverb.com/UK

Vintage BENCH TEST

1956 LES PAUL TV SPECIAL

HUW PRICE finds that this played-in and wonderfully maintained Les Paul Special challenges some of the conventional wisdom on Gibson's student rebels...

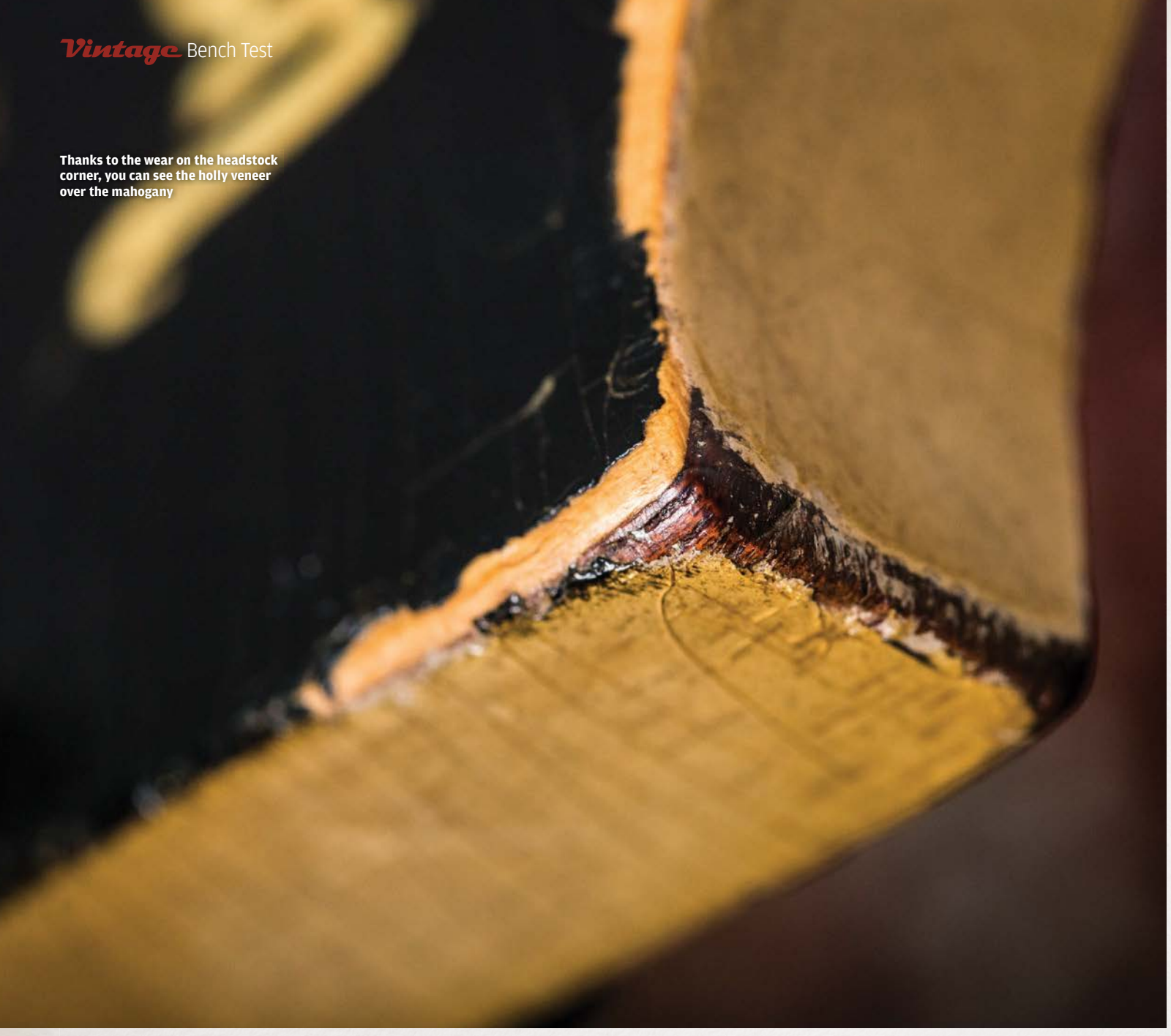
Anyone buying an entry-level electric might reasonably expect a lower grade of wood, pickups and hardware. However, back in the 1950s, Gibson cut corners on its 'student' guitars by streamlining the production process with flat rather than carved tops, minimal binding and simpler finishes that required fewer stages on the production line. In every other respect, the quality was up there with the top-of-the-line models.

It's reasonable to say 'budget' Gibsons of the mid-50s were simplified, rather than compromised

For instance, wrapover tailpieces were deemed perfectly good enough until 1955 and P-90s remained Gibson's premium pickup until 1957. This Special has the same potentiometers and paper/oil bumblebee capacitors that were fitted in all the top-end Gibsons of the era and the neck is just some trapezoid markers and an inlaid logo away from being the same as a Les Paul Standard's. The full but fabulous feel is absolutely identical and it surely seems reasonable to say that 'budget' Gibsons of the mid-50s era were actually simplified, rather than compromised.

This Special was made in 1956 and it's a well-played and well-preserved example that was recently shipped over from New York. The wheat-toned early TV finish has been rubbed away in the forearm area and the back of the neck, and there's copious lacquer checking, with crazed cracking rather than >

There's no doubt this tailpiece is original and you can see rub-through marks between grooves worn into it by the strings



Thanks to the wear on the headstock corner, you can see the holly veneer over the mahogany

KEY FEATURES

1956 Les Paul TV Special

- **PRICE** NA
- **DESCRIPTION** Solid-body electric guitar, made in the USA
- **BUILD** Solid maghogany body, set mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, pearl dots and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Aluminium wrapover tailpiece, Kluson three-on-a-plate tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Two P-90 pickups, individual volume and tone, three-way pickup selector switch
- **FINISH** TV Yellow
- **SCALE LENGTH** 626mm/24 5/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 50.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.4kg/7.5lbs
- **CONTACT** NA

the more uniform lateral lines which you'll see on so many replicas.

The current owner has installed locking strap buttons and the only other non-original parts are the tuner buttons and a shim under the nylon nut. Inside the control cavity, all the solder joints look original and the wiring appears to be untouched since this guitar left the Gibson factory. A headstock break was repaired back in 1974 and it can be seen to be stable, because no attempt was made to conceal the work. Under black light, everything looks exactly as an original example should.

Even unplugged, the Special's sound is huge and loud – you're treated to sparkle and thump

In use

Everybody knows that Les Paul Juniors sound better than Specials, right? After all, there's no neck pickup to compromise the integrity of the neck joint or suck the sustain out of the strings by exerting unnecessary magnetic pull. On the evidence of this guitar, that theory has about as much credence as the 'resonance damping Goldtop finish' hypothesis.

It probably helps that owner Neil Ivison is a professional guitar tech because, thanks to his efforts, the playability of this Special is just about perfect. A fine-quality refret has also been carried out, with wire that's closer to late-50s Gibson spec than the skinnier stuff that would have been used circa 1956. Most would find it a practical and pragmatic upgrade for a player's grade guitar.

Despite (or possibly because of) the absence of a Tune-o-matic bridge, this Special intonates astonishingly well and a super-slinky action >

It's a Special, not a Junior – and it says so on the headstock

Solid and stable since 1974, no attempt has been made to conceal the headstock repair

The frets have been changed – and it's a change for the better

Top
Neck wear has exposed the lighter base coats of the TV finish

Above
The original Kluson tuners feel stiff, but tuning is rock solid

combines with rock-solid stability. The played-in feel may be pure vintage, but you could gig this guitar with the realistic expectation of a trouble-free night. In fact, during the entire time I was testing it, this guitar barely needed to be retuned.

Even unplugged, the sound is huge and loud. The frequency response reaches points above and below the norm for an unplugged solidbody, so you're treated to sparkle and thump. Plugged in, the Special's best feature is the full-on midrange and extraordinary note separation. When you strum through a chord, you can clearly discern every note as the tone see-saws between the upper and lower mids while it sustains.

The feel is pure vintage, but you could gig this with the realistic expectation of a trouble-free night

The two pickups sound supremely balanced, yet distinct. Both have enough 'oomph' to push a valve amp into a throaty overdrive, but the bass remains clear and the treble is never anything other than sweet. The bridge's wiry bite when soloing high on the plain strings contrasts with the neck's more flutey tone and rounded attack. Switch to chords and you get woody depth and horn-like honk from the neck, with snarly but still chiming rock tones and crisper attack from the bridge.

The middle setting is perhaps the pick of the bunch, and even greater than the sum of its parts. The midrange scoops out just a touch to emphasise the bridge's ring and the neck's warmth, with a hint of phasiness and a slightly compressed response.

This setting is absolutely perfect for ditching the pick and digging in with your fingers, or exploring the smorgasbord of sounds you can dial in using the controls. >

The changed tuner buttons are among the few non-original features, but this is only really apparent under black light

Above **It's great to see the original poker chip and switch tip are still on the guitar – even Tom Murphy would struggle to mimic this lacquer-checking!**

Like the best Juniors, this Special retains complete clarity when you turn down the volume controls, and it even manages to pull off the 'pseudo acoustic guitar' trick. You can also dial in an approximation of Clapton's 'woman' tone, with overdrive and the tone control backed-off.

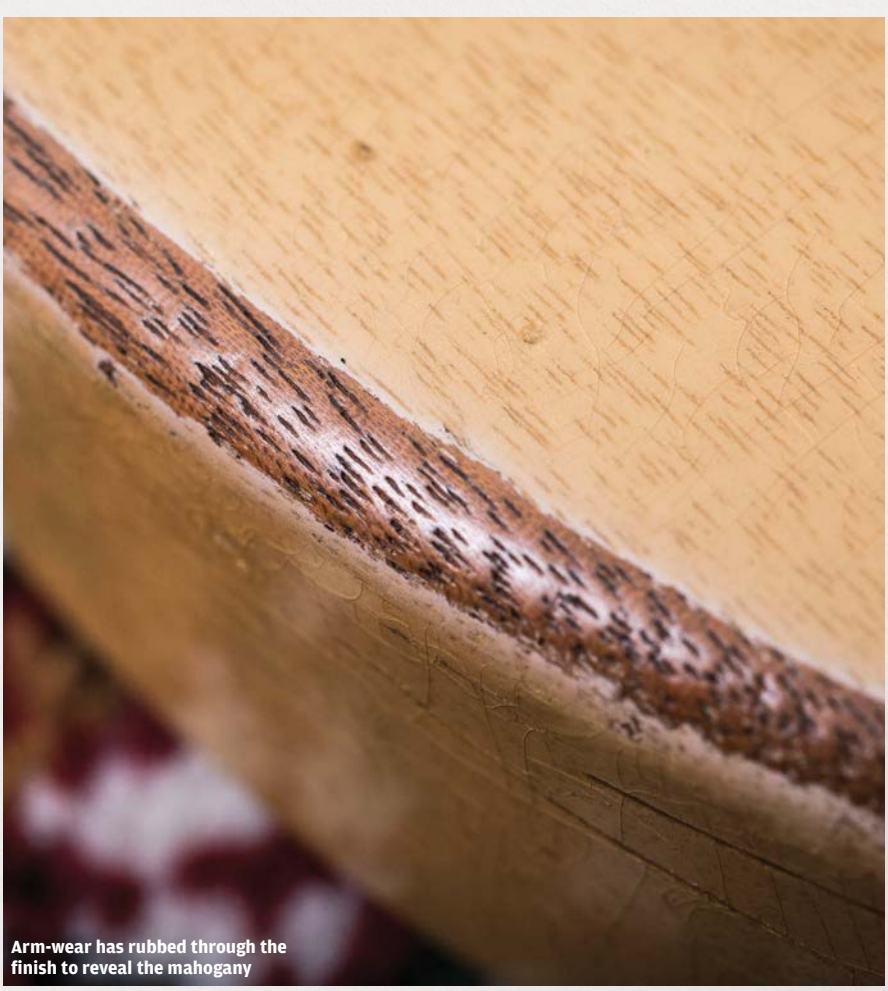
While testing out this guitar, I took the opportunity to compare the Special's pickups with a variety of bespoke modern P-90s but you may be surprised to learn that the original units sound and respond most like our set of Monty's PAF replicas. Like last year's '55/'57 Goldtop shootout, it's a reminder that original PAFs were designed simply to buck hum rather than to be a huge sonic departure from P-90s.

I've had the pleasure of playing several vintage Juniors, but this was my first lengthy encounter with a 50s Special. Although I find the single- and double-cutaway Juniors have slightly more visual appeal, I'd choose to own a Special. In fact, I wish I could own *this* Special – I can't really imagine how one of these guitars could sound or play any better. And considering how much more a 50s Goldtop would cost, Specials are still relatively affordable.

A Special can do the Junior thing, but a Junior can only do part of the Special thing – precisely one third, in fact

A Special can do the Junior thing, but a Junior can only do part of the Special thing – precisely one third of it, in fact. Granted, you can get a lot of fantastic tones from a Junior through judicious use of the controls, but there's a world of difference between a bridge P-90 with its tone control rolled back and a proper neck pickup. I've finally found a cure for the Junior GAS that's been troubling me, but unfortunately, lusting after a single-cut Special feels even worse.

The Brazilian rosewood fingerboard is smooth and clean, with gorgeous colour and grain pattern



Arm-wear has rubbed through the finish to reveal the mahogany

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SCREEN DREAM

Malcolm Lindsay's TV and film career has been a creative journey. However, as *G&B* finds out, the project to build his dream guitar could be his most remarkable yet

Story & photography **Mark Alexander**

There comes a time in every guitarist's life when they consider building their own dream guitar. For some, it goes no further than a doodle on the back of an exercise book. For others, it becomes a life-long ambition. Thankfully for us, Malcolm Lindsay falls into the second category.

Based in the leafy suburbs of Glasgow, Lindsay has forged an award-winning career as a TV and film composer. His film scores include *My Nazi Legacy*, *Young Adam* (on which he collaborated with David Byrne), Penny Woolcock's highly acclaimed *Exodus* and *16 Years Of Alcohol*. In TV land, his soundscapes have illuminated numerous projects, including *Taggart* and *Whitechapel*.

His stylish, contemporary home is awash with musical references; from the baby grand in the lounge to a small glass-walled annex in which a record player resides, along with two comfy chairs and a pair of Rogers monitors, which Lindsay proudly explains are genuine BBC studio monitor speakers.

In his own studio, four LCD screens look down on a keyboard, mixing desk, computer keyboard and video player. In the corner, a Laney amp hums gently. Along one side of the otherwise bare room are Lindsay's guitars, with Gibson being the dominant marque. As if that wasn't impressive enough, sliding wall panels behind his expansive desk reveal yet more of his collection. This is where the special ones live.

During his 15 years as a professional composer, Lindsay has amassed a guitar collection that spans the decades. For instance, he has a particular liking for instruments from 1966, which he says is just a happy coincidence. But while his obsession has reached a peak with his very latest additions, it hasn't always been like this.

"I wasn't allowed to buy my first guitar until I passed my grade five in piano. I wasn't particularly good at piano, so it took me a long time," he says modestly. "But as soon as I got my grade five, I chucked piano and bought my first guitar. Shortly after, I saw Gallagher & Lyle, and thought they were astonishing – fantastic harmonies and >

Opposite page **Lindsay in his studio with his Gibson Hummingbird**
This page, top left **An ES-330 from 1966 – Lindsay's favourite year**
Top right **Lindsay's Gibson ES-325**

Above left **Paul Robertson acoustic (left), Gibson ES-330**
Top right **Malcolm's Les Paul Recording**
Above right **A Gibson ES-125 with Lindsay's pedalboard**

surrounded by instruments. At the age of 15, I decided that's what I wanted to do."

Four years later, Lindsay appeared on the same stage as he had seen his heroes perform, fulfilling perhaps his earliest musical ambition. His first guitar was just as impressive. With an adjustable bridge, his Yamaha FG-330 was a high-spec bargain snapped up for £40, that still holds a place in his collection. "They're collectable now," he says. "People go ape, in a small way. The action is so low, it's stunning."

While the Yamaha wasn't a bad starting point, Lindsay always craved the Americana zing of a Gibson Hummingbird, but found to his cost that unearthing one that lived up to his musical aspirations was more difficult than he thought. "I couldn't find one that sounded good, so eventually I imported one from New York," he admits. "I bought it without seeing it, which is a daft thing to do. I was really disappointed with the sound, so sent it back. I could never find a vintage one that sounded great, so eventually I bought a new one. There were quite a few around, so I was able to try a few until I found one that I liked."

Lindsay's 2006 Hummingbird is his go-to guitar for film and album work. That is unless he seeks a different tonal palette. "The whole point of having so many guitars is that you can use different sounds for different purposes," he says.

Ageing process

As if to prove the versatility of his collection, Lindsay starts strumming his 1936 Gibson Recording King M-2 archtop acoustic, with its unmistakable boxy tone that belies the dishevelled guitar that arrived from the US with a broken neck. He explains that a further £40 investment had the £200 guitar up and running: "It has ended up on a couple of albums. It's great for picking."

But if age were the only measure, the prize exhibit in Lindsay's collection would be an innocuous-looking acoustic he acquired from an auction in Glasgow. Incredibly, his own painstaking research traced the patent on the machineheads back to 1889. "It's hard to verify, but I believe it was built by the guys who were building Martins – or were successfully competing with them at that time," he says calmly. "I was bidding on two other

guitars. I bought a Palermo from 1834 for £500, and bought that one for £80. I sold the Palermo to a craftsman in England."

So far, Lindsay has been happy to showcase his antiquities, each one offering rich tones to edify a moment of cinematic nostalgia. And while he has a clear affinity to the past, he isn't afraid to try something new.

"I've always wanted a Martin, but they are very expensive. I eventually came across this guitar, which sounds just as good and is made by a Glasgow guitar maker, Paul Robertson," he explains. "I knew he was Scottish, but that was all. I mistook him for an experienced guitar builder, but he's just out of college. This is his 10th guitar, and he built his 11th for Graeme Duffin of Wet Wet Wet fame. It's stunning, I fell in love with it. It has revived my interest in guitar playing."

All that jazz

Although Lindsay has an impressive range of acoustics, his true passion is jazz. To this end, he has only one solidbody electric – a Gibson Les Paul Recording, of which he is intensely proud. He has added to that a couple of early 1970s Gibson ES-325s and a pair of Gibson ES-125s; one sporting a cutaway, one without. In any other collection, these solid, semi-acoustic and hollowbody masterpieces would sit proudly on top of the pile. In truth, such cherished instruments have merely shaped Lindsay's journey from guitar collector to creator.

But before he unveils the zenith of his accumulated musical knowledge, Lindsay is keen to dig out two of his most prized guitars. "At the time, this was the second most expensive guitar Gibson made, and I'll show you the most expensive in a minute," he says mischievously as he unveils a stunning Gibson Barney Kessel signature model.

Big, bright and distinctive with a deep double cutaway, the Barney Kessel was introduced by Gibson in 1961, and eventually phased out in 1974. This is a special guitar with an earthy tone and bass response that channels the era before the rise of solidbody guitars. "It has that big jazz sound," says Lindsay. "It's a lovely guitar to play. I got it in 2001. In fact, I bought two and sold one. I use it now for jazz chording. I love the colours, and it's in great condition." >

Top left **Lindsay playing his Les Paul Recording – his only solidbody**
Top right **Lindsay with his Gibson Hummingbird**
Above left **The Recording King headstock taking pride of place**
Above right **Lindsay with his beloved Barney Kessel Custom**

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As Lindsay gazes at his Barney Kessel Custom, it's clear his appreciation of the instrument goes well beyond the joys of ownership. There is recognition in his eyes that what he holds in his hands is a piece of musical history from an era that clearly resonates with him. Yes, it hails from 1966 – as does the pièce de résistance and the veritable cherry on Lindsay's multi-layered cake of delicious guitar goodness. "This is the posh one – the one that only comes out at Christmas," he says.

After moving guitars and empty cases around, a squeaky lid is opened and a jaw-dropping 1966 Gibson Johnny Smith Double is revealed. The guitar was modelled on Smith's D'Angelico New Yorker Special with a DeArmond pickup and reeks of a time when colourful zoot suits and bebop jazz ruled. "It has the best neck in the world," says Lindsay. "When you're playing guitar, it's about having confidence in the neck – that it will be in tune all the way up. This one feels fantastic. It's difficult to put into words. This is the first time I've played it for at least a year and the sound is like nothing else."

The tobacco sunburst and mini-humbuckers create a beautiful guitar. The bountiful curves and stunning woods are the stuff of bedroom poster porn. After all, this is the kind of guitar that many of us would extract our internal organs to trade for a few quiet moments with. It is special, but it is also not without its faults.

"There is a design flaw that I absolutely hate," says Lindsay. "All the electronics and pickups are fixed to the scratchplate, and the original scratchplate disintegrated. I got quotes to build a new scratchplate or to buy an original one at a cost of £400. I got round it by getting this Ibanez copy. The whole design is only connected by a tenuous screw here and there. It's horrible, so I get really frustrated by it."

Dream guitars

As much as he appreciates the tonal possibilities of his stunning collection, Lindsay is also acutely aware of his guitars' limitations. So, when an opportunity arose to create his own modern-day classic that was as soulful as it was practical, he grabbed it with gusto.

"When I bought it, it was in a terrible state," he says, recalling buying the 1957 Gibson ES-225 >

Main image **The tone and volume pots on Lindsay's Gibson ES-225 (1957) refurb**
Top right **Malcolm's Gibson Johnny Smith Double**
Above right **The stunning '57 ES-225 refurb in all its glory**

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Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *Guitar & Bass*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for a future issue

Main picture **Malcolm's Gibson ES-225 (1956) refurb**
Top right **The floating bridge on his '56 ES-225 refurb**
Above right **The ingenious floating mini-humbucker**

that he has since renovated with the help of Ian Dickinson of The Guitar Workshop in Glasgow. "It had been stripped back and most of the binding had gone. There were no parts on it at all – it was just a piece of wood. It gave me the chance to build the guitar of my dreams."

Lindsay spec'd the hardware, while Dickinson handled the woodwork and Dave Wilson completed the refinishing. The project lasted about 18 months and cost less than £2,000 to complete. In that time and for that money, a minor miracle was achieved. "It's not like an original ES-225, because it has a different bridge and essentially a brand new neck. It has a sheen finish, not a high-gloss, so it has a vintage look and it is already in use."

From the broken shell of a guitar, Lindsay, Dickinson and Wilson created a solid instrument that looks and plays as if it has just left the factory. Of course, the beauty is it's based on a 59-year-old wood, which provides a rich source of tonal options, and yet plays as if the wrappers have just come off.

It is miraculous, and to prove it wasn't a fluke, they did it again. "This is the pretty one," says Lindsay coolly presenting a stunning 1956 ES-225, this time with a radiating sunburst, an adjustable metal bridge and the same mini-bucker that adorns his Johnny Smith signature. His second offering has the same eye-popping looks as the first, but with a glorious finish based around Larry Carlton's Gibson ES-335.

"It is great to be able to choose your own finish," says Lindsay. "It just looks stunning, and it's unique. You'll see on the Johnny Smith, there is a piece of metal that is really unsightly around the neck pickup, so Ian came up with this way of mounting the pickup directly, which I've never seen done on a Gibson guitar before. I've also never seen this combination of a P-90 and a mini-humbucker. So I've built a guitar especially for me and for the sounds I am interested in. It's a great thing to do."

The success of Lindsay's transition from consumer to creator is inspiring. It was also deceptively easy. Lindsay is a skilled musician and composer who, with Dickinson's assistance, has managed to distil his knowledge and experience into two stunning guitars. Not all of us have the opportunity or aptitude to do that, but Lindsay did with remarkable results.

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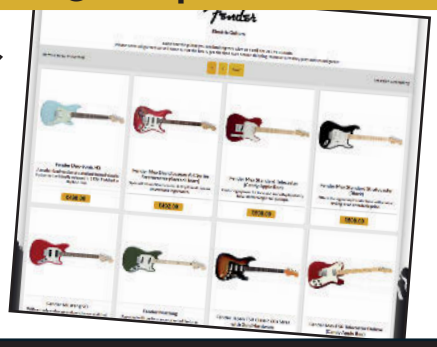

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All about... Acoustic Strings

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String theory

The drivers behind the evolution of acoustic guitar strings have been much the same as those that drove the development of guitar amplifiers – namely the quest for improved clarity and higher volume.

The six-string guitar as we know it began to become standardised only towards the end of the 18th century. Prior to that, octave and unison string pairs were used to achieve fullness and volume, and the practice continues with mandolin-style instruments. During that era, strings were made from animal intestines – hence the name 'gut strings'. The plain strings were dried, scraped and twisted gut, while bass strings had gut cores wrapped with silver wire to add the mass necessary for low-frequency vibration without making them too stiff to be playable.

Genuine gut strings are still favoured by musicians who play early styles of music, and they are available from Aquila, Damian Dlugolecki, Pyramid and others. Some still use the term 'gut-string guitar' to refer to any classical-style instrument, but nylon plain and wire-wrapped nylon silk core strings are far more commonplace today.

With steel strings, Martin remained cautious until 1922 when it reintroduced the Style 17 with a heavier-braced mahogany top and steel strings. It was such a success that the Style 18 and 28 models were soon similarly outfitted – and by the mid 1920s, steel strings were standard on Martins, and gut strings had become optional.

Steel-strung archtops powered the rhythm sections of the jazz age and steel-strung flat-tops did the same for country, blues and folk players. Before long, the guitar buried the banjo, and it has remained the most popular stringed instrument. Let's, then, take a closer look at the way steel strings are made.

Core strengths

Drawn wire has a round cross-section, and for the first few decades, steel string sets had wound strings that were manufactured much like the old gut strings. However, instead of a gut or nylon core, the windings were wrapped onto a round steel core.

Unfortunately, the smooth and slippery round core wire provided a less than ideal surface for holding the windings, and it was common for wound strings to loosen or even unravel and go dead. String manufacturers solved the problem by developing a method to draw core wire with a hexagonal cross-section that provided more grip for the outer windings.

Steel-strung archtops powered the rhythm sections of the jazz age and steel-strung flat-tops did the same for country, blues and folk

During WWII, a shortage of materials prompted New York luthier Albert Augustine to try nylon line as a guitar string. He persuaded DuPont to start making nylon guitar strings and, despite a slow start, they became the classical string of choice after Andrés Segovia began using them.

By the mid-19th century, European and American acoustic guitar designs were evolving independently. Most classical guitars are still based on the fan-bracing pattern perfected by Antonio de Torres. However, Christian Frederick Martin developed an X-bracing pattern that was conceived for gut strings but only realised its full potential half a century after his death, with the advent of steel strings.

From the 1880s, improved wire drawing technology led to the development of steel strings known initially as 'mandolin wire'. These new strings made instruments from the mandolin family and banjos louder than ever before. The small-bodied gut-string guitars of the era couldn't compete, and for a while they were relegated to the parlour.

Orville Gibson and the Larson brothers were amongst the first guitar makers to respond. They developed archtop guitars built more like violins, that had the inherent strength to withstand the increased tension of steel strings. Although the basic structure of the X-brace was almost strong enough to cope

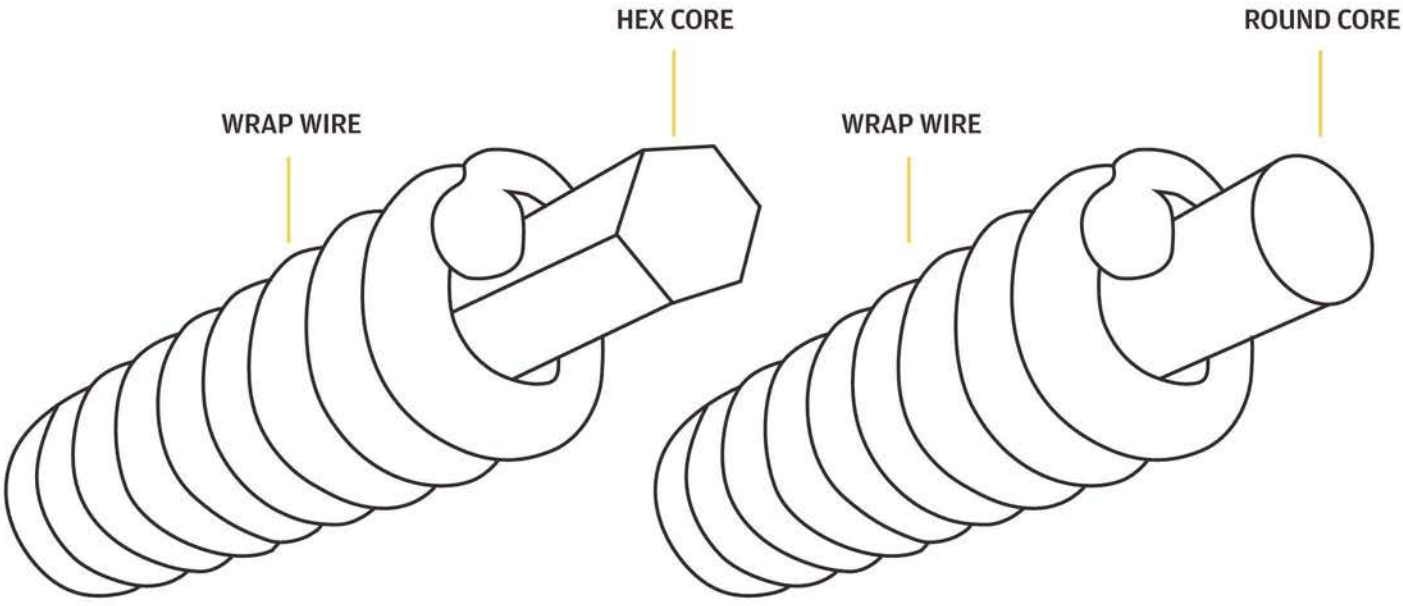
Hex-core strings have a brighter and clearer tone and they are less prone to mishaps when stringing up, but they lose their initial brightness quite quickly. A hex core doesn't allow such a pure orbit of vibration, and some feel that round-core strings have a nicer tone.

Also, the spaces between the wrap wires and the core are much smaller, so dirt and contaminants don't build up as quickly with round cores. They may not be as bright to start with, but round cores maintain the same tone for longer and many guitarists find that they are easier to play.

Remember those great acoustic tones from the 50s and 60s all came from round-core strings. They won't suit everybody, but if you want to try some, check out Newtone, Pyramid and DR Strings.

Alloys

Although the plain strings and cores are always made from corrosion-resistant steel wire, the wrap wires can be made from different alloys that all have specific tonal characteristics. The most common alloys are designated phosphor bronze and bronze. The difference is in the alloy composition, >



which is a mixture of copper and tin. Phosphor bronze strings have a higher proportion of copper, and are sometimes described as 92/8 (92 per cent copper, eight per cent tin). Bronze strings have a higher proportion of tin, with an 80/20 ratio – and some companies, such as D'Addario, make 'in-between' sets with an 85/15 mix.

Bronze strings generally sound bright, but also fatter and bassier than phosphor bronze. In contrast, phosphor bronze has more clarity, definition and sparkle, but doesn't sound quite as full in the midrange. Strummers might prefer the 80/20s, but 92/8s should suit fingerstylists and dropped open tunings.

A naturally occurring alloy containing 67 per cent nickel, 32 per cent copper and some iron was found in an Ontario mine back in 1906 and named 'monel'. Gibson used it to make strings in the 1930s, due to monel's high resistance to corrosion.

Bronze strings generally sound bright, but fatter and bassier than phosphor bronze. Phosphor bronze has more clarity, definition and sparkle

Monel is used most commonly for bass strings, but several companies have reintroduced monel acoustic strings for players chasing old-school tone. On the right guitar, they offer superb clarity without excessive brightness, they're full without sounding tubby and bass definition is superb. String-to-string balance is very smooth and they maintain their tone far longer than the usual alloys.

Live long and phosphor

When you're playing an electric guitar, you can always turn up the treble once new strings have lost some of their brightness. When you're playing an acoustic guitar (acoustically) there's nothing that can be done about dull string tone.

If you wear out strings quickly but prefer brighter guitar tone, the cost of regular string changes can be prohibitive. One option to consider is using a set of long-life strings coated with Gore-Tex such as Elixir Nanowebs. You can find coated bronze and phosphor bronze strings, and the coatings come in various thicknesses. Some manufacturers coat the entire string and others coat the winding wire before it's wrapped onto the core.

Coated strings – particularly those with thick coatings – are naturally a little duller-sounding than equivalent non-coated strings, but they retain their 'out of the packet' tone for longer. You may also notice less friction and string squeak as a result of the coating. This aspect divides opinion, as some dislike the 'feel' of coated strings.

Of course, not everybody likes the bright tone of fresh strings. If you're one of those players, there's not much point in paying extra for coatings that will maintain the characteristics you dislike for even longer. Some miss the fresh-string zing that most coated strings don't provide, but take a view that they sound better over a longer period.

The pragmatic player may choose coated strings for practising and gigging, and non-coated strings for recording. Although they're not for everybody, coated strings are certainly worth a go, but be sure to research the specs before buying.

Feel the tension

Not all acoustics are created equal. Some have thick soundboards and/or heavy bracing, and light-gauge strings may not be able to generate sufficient energy to drive the top and make the guitar sound its best. Conversely, heavy-gauge strings can be too much for lighter guitars.

When steel strings became standard, Martin found itself busy repairing pulled-up bridges and bellied tops. The bridges and bracing were beefed up to cope with the extra tension of increasingly heavy string gauges, and scalloped bracing was eventually phased out altogether. The whole vintage guitar thing really started in the early 60s as folkies discovered the superior response and dynamics of Martin's pre-war models.

You should also consider playability when selecting string gauges. The best guarantee of good tone is a guitar that feels good to play, and it's pointless to struggle with overly heavy strings for the five minutes of sonic nirvana you'll enjoy before your fretting hand starts to cramp up.

If the string-to-string balance sounds a little uneven on your guitar, you should consider fitting a custom string set. For inherently well-balanced designs such as an OM or 000, some may appreciate sets where every string exerts a similar tension when tuned to pitch. Alternatively, you could try lowering the gauge of the wound strings while retaining heavier plain strings if your dreadnought sounds too boomy.

Using heavier low strings can also help to retain definition and volume if you regularly play in dropped tunings. Some manufacturers market string sets that are designed specifically for DADGAD players, and many provide tension information for those aiming to assemble even-tension sets. It's also worth checking out some of the low-tension sets that combine big-string tone with thin-string playability by changing the core-to-wrap ratio.

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Chord Clinic

Following on from last month's study of an eight-bar chord sequence, **ROD FOGG** takes it to the bridge – or maybe the chorus

In case you didn't see last month's Chord Clinic, we started with a four-bar sequence based on the chords D, G, E minor and A, and ended up with an eight-bar sequence that included D/F#, A#dim, E, E minor seven, B minor and an assortment of sus4 chords. We then looked at various ways these chords could be arranged on the guitar, often using high open strings as pedal notes while the chords changed underneath.

In this edition, we are going to imagine a chorus or bridge that will follow on from the above sequence. The first point to make is that as the chords above change every bar – and sometimes twice in a bar – it would be good to experiment with a slower rate of harmonic change. In the key of D, the bridge, pre-chorus, middle eight, or whatever else you would like to call it, often begins on a G chord, though of course other options are available.

So let's begin with two bars of G followed by two bars of D, played twice to make eight bars. Replacing the D chord with an A chord would work equally well, and you could also try four bars ending in D, followed by four bars ending in A. Figure 1 shows you some full-fat barre chord shapes that you could use to play this sequence; regular readers will know that these are the kinds of chords that we often try to avoid in Chord Clinic because of their predictability and hollowed-out sound. That's due to the large number of fifths and octaves contained within, but on this occasion this kind of simplicity works well as an antidote to the busy feel of our verse. Notice we've included two fingerings for the D chord, as not everyone is able to get their third finger flat to hold down three strings.

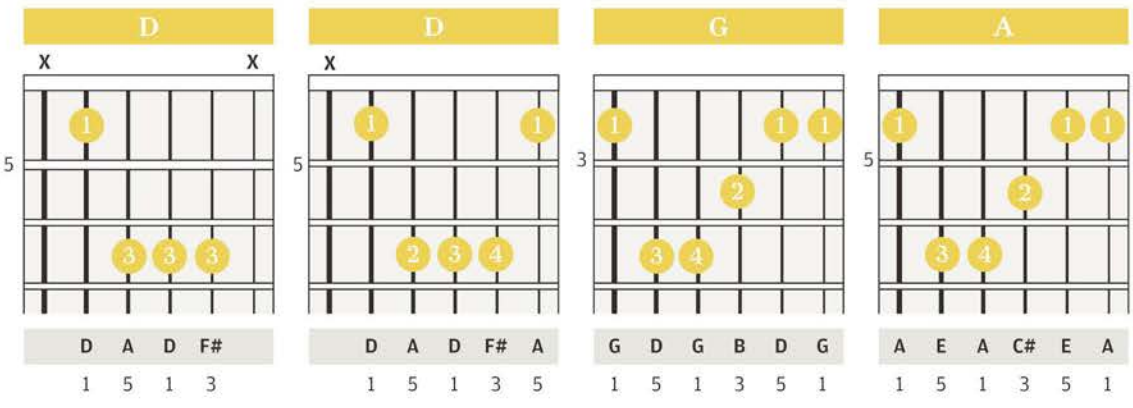
Suspended chords – usually abbreviated to sus – can be very useful if you have a few bars on the same chord and you want to introduce a hint of movement without actually changing chords. Figure 2 adds some jangly open strings and suggests you could play Gsus4 before G, Dsus4 before D and Asus4 before A. Give it a try, but also try leaving out the D chord altogether (so you play two bars of Dsus4), and then instead of A play A7sus4 and A7. This will put a high G at the third fret on your top string, at the top of every chord. This is an example of one of those pedal notes that we mentioned in the introduction. Here at Chord Clinic, we like pedal notes quite a lot and will return to them in figure 4.

But first, figure 3 needs to explore the possibility of playing suspended chords, together with the barre chords from figure 1. Once again, we have gone for the maxed-out six- and five-string versions of these chords, but just for comparison we have included the cut-down, four-string, thumb-over voicings for Gsus4 and Asus4, together with a four-note voicing of Dsus4. Notice that these chords have a punchy sound without the fat but hollow quality that the doubled notes give the barre chords. We like both, and it is hard to say definitively which type is better as it depends what you are trying to achieve. However, recording engineers tend to like the slimmed-down versions of these chords because they occupy less sonic real estate.

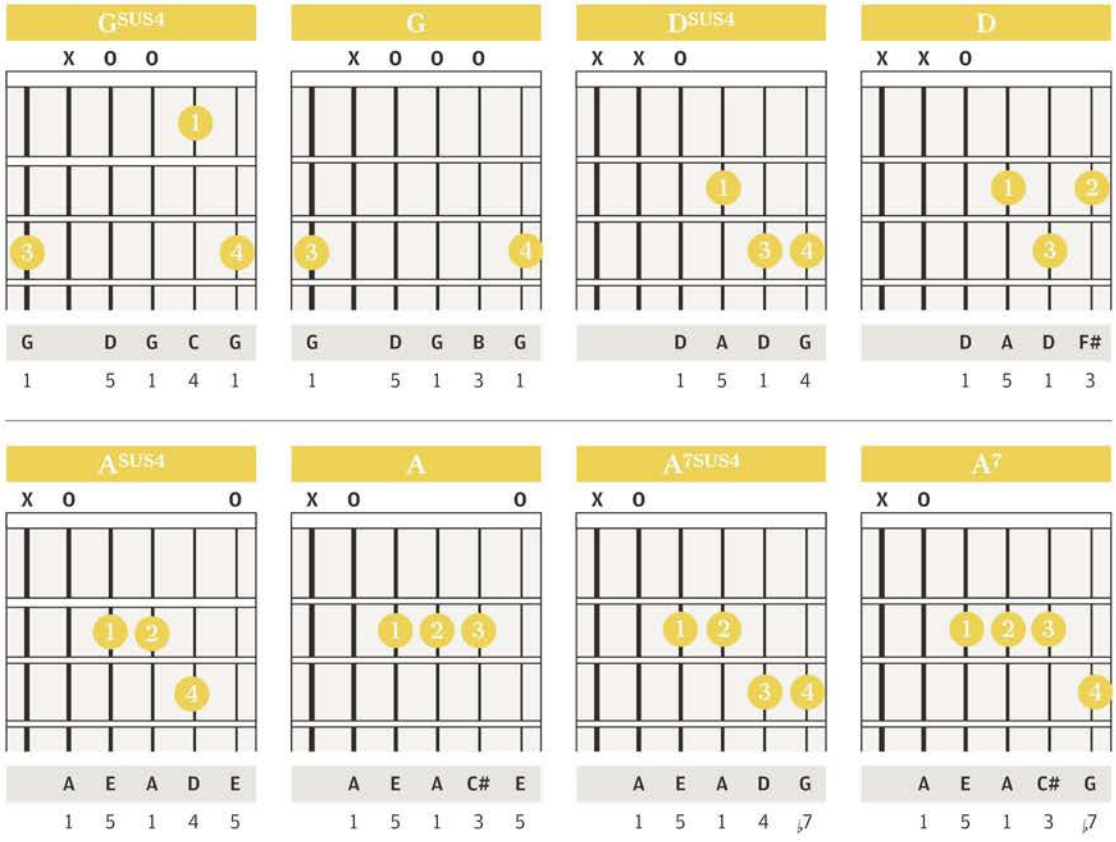
In Figure 4, we put the pedal note back where it belongs at the bottom of the chord (the term originated when organists held a low note on the pedals at their feet while changing chords on the manual above) and experiment with an open A string beneath G, D and A four-note voicings. These are 'slash' chords, where the first letter tells you what chord to play, and the second letter – after the forward slash – is a specified bass note.

Notice how the pedal note seems to hold the music still while the chords above struggle to get away. Try them as three-note voicings, leaving out either all of the notes on the D string or those on the E string. Your homework? Some of these shapes can be converted easily into sus4 chords by raising the third of the chord one fret; see if you can figure them out and play Gsus4/A followed by G/A, and Dsus4/A followed by D/A. More next month!

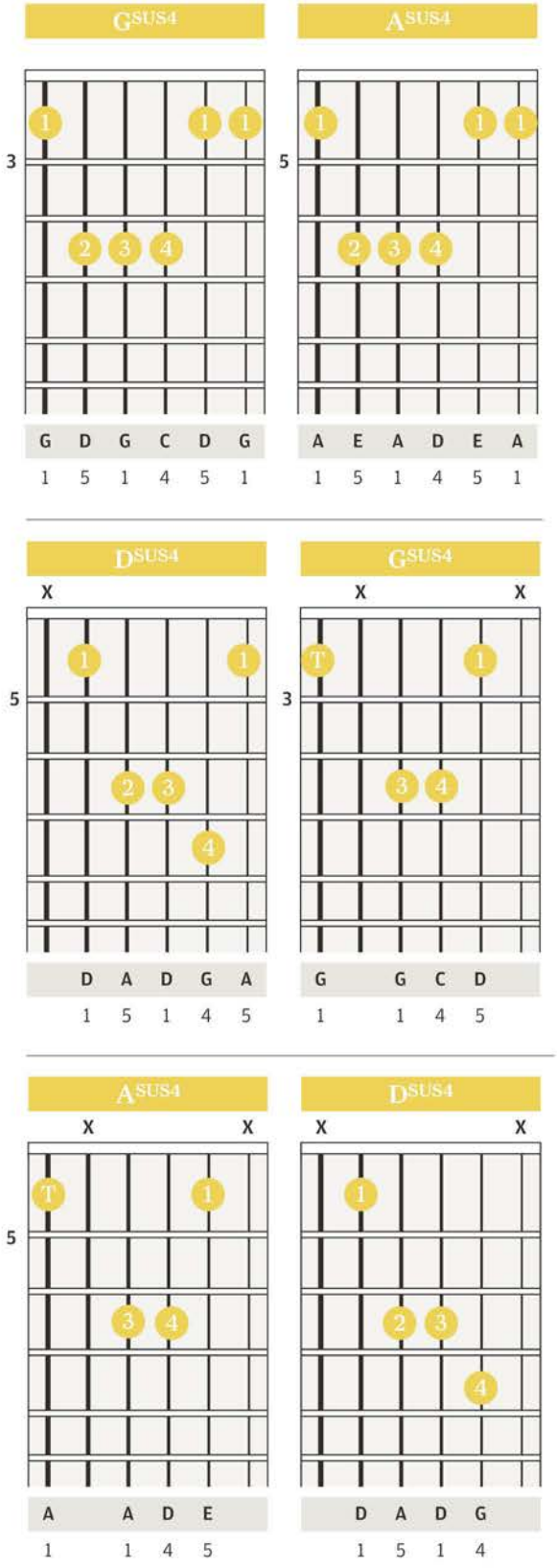
Called to the barre (Fig 1)



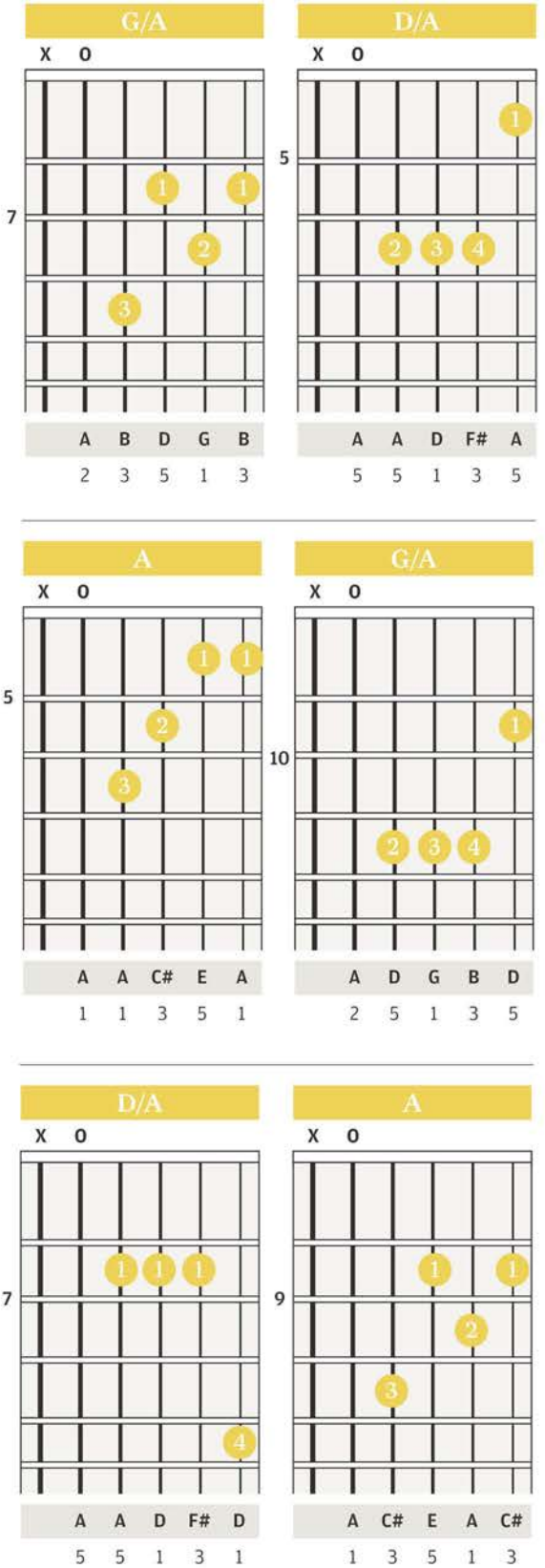
Disbarred (Fig 2)



Suspended at the barre (Fig 3)



Pedalling harder (Fig 4)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: still learning at 70, debunking the Lucy myth, and essential tips

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Busy learning

Dear *G&B*,

I enjoy reading my monthly dose of *G&B*, particularly the Private Collection articles. I always drool over guitars owned by others and wish that I, too, had such a collection. But why do we buy so many when we can only play one at a time? In my case, it's probably nostalgia and the love of a bargain.

Having dabbled unsuccessfully in playing the beasts for the last 50-odd years, I thought that as I was approaching 70 I ought to have one last try. A purchase of a cheap Strat copy at a car boot got me trying again, and then when a genuine Strat came up for sale locally on Gumtree I bought it – well, Hank had played one when I was a teenager. Admittedly, it was a Mexican model but a 'Limited Edition' red one with a black scratchplate.

I persevered at home with limited success until an Epiphone Wildkat Royale appeared on the same selling site – well, it looked somewhat like the guitars that Chet played and was as near to a Gretsch White Falcon as I was ever likely to afford. It was immaculate, had TV Jones pups fitted and was too good to ignore.

After several other car boot purchases that I repaired and refinished, and then either sold on or gave away, I started having some lessons and am gradually making slow progress. However, I must stop watching my Gumtree saved searches because I've added a Vintage SG copy, an Epiphone Firebird and an Epiphone Les Paul Standard – all versions of guitars that I remember seeing years ago and thinking they looked 'cool'.

The Fender and the two Epiphones have all been bought for £270 each, with the SG going for about half that figure.

I have to say that, as very much an amateur player I'm really impressed with the quality of all these lower-end products. And for those of us readers who can't afford the mega-bucks prices of some of your reviewed items they are a great alternative – even more so when purchased second-hand (or should that be road worn?!).

My lessons have become very interesting for my tutor, as he's always waiting to see what guitar I bring in, and always wants a try on anything new.

Keep up the good work with the magazine, it's much appreciated.

Tony Bagwell, via email

G&B Thanks for the kind words, Tony. Sure, you can only play one guitar at a time but who can resist a second-hand bargain? Certainly not us...

The Lucy myth

Dear *G&B*,

Further to your 'Passing The Torch' feature about George Harrison's '57 'Lucy' Les Paul, I've read this story several times (Dave Hunter, Tony Bacon, Andy Babiuk) and was excited the first time I heard it. If it were true, the same Les Paul we heard on *Do You Believe In Magic?* was the same one heard on *Revolution*. When I heard it, I contacted Steve Boone of The Lovin' Spoonful and he pointed out it was nonsense. His own brother, Skip of Autosalvage, had sold John Sebastian the guitar only to try to buy it back a couple of days later. John refused.

John's Les Paul is a Sunburst, not a beat-up Goldtop as Rick Derringer has often reported. Look at the photo I've attached and you see Skip Boone in the first row with the guitar he sold to John, and Steve in the second row with a Les Paul Goldtop. Steve wrote to me that he traded his Goldtop in to a pawnshop in the East Village in New York for the white Fender P Bass he used sometimes with the Spoonful live. It's my theory that Rick bought Steve's Goldtop from the shop and was told it belonged to a member of The Lovin' Spoonful. Since Sebastian was the only Spoon that played a Les Paul in that band (as seen on the sleeve for *Summer In The City* and the *Ready Steady Go* show, which Rhino used for an album cover), everyone assumed it was his guitar, not Steve's. However, Sebastian's Les Paul belongs to Gordon Kennedy (whose dad played the *Pretty Woman* riff for Roy Orbison) down in Nashville. George Gruhn put Sebastian's Les Paul on the cover of his guitar magazine in the 90s, looking just like the one John played in the Spoonful. So the story about Sebastian's Les Paul being George Harrison's is bunk. It's probably Steve Boone's guitar. The part after Rick gets it is probably correct, but it doesn't start with John. Time to lay that one to rest.

Steve Harvey, via email

G&B Thanks Steve, long may the guitarcheology continue!

Skip Boone (front left) with the Sunburst Les Paul he sold to John Sebastian, and Steve Boone (back left)

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Essential reading

Dear *G&B*,

Congratulations on a job well done with your *Essential Tone Tips, Mods & Upgrades* special edition. My wife will second that, as it's kept me quiet and out of her way for a good three weeks since I bought it – no mean feat! I've had the guitar bug since I got my first axe – a red Teisco Tulip, way back in 1969, and my collection is now comfortably into double figures. Despite all those years of happy playing – and quite a lot of tinkering with – my guitars, I'm not afraid to say that there's plenty I don't know how to do when it comes to maintenance, set-ups and generally getting the best tone out of my precious guitars. That's where *G&B* comes in. I've just spent a very happy weekend following the Strat set-up tips from your special, and I'm pleased to report that my 60th Anniversary Strat is now playing (and looking) better than ever before! Now it's just my other 13 guitars that I need to sort out! Keep up the good work team!

Alan Colquhan, via email

***G&B*'s *Essential Tone Tips, Mods & Upgrades* bookazine is available now. Have you got yours?**

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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

The Rolling Stones

BLUE & LONESOME

According to Keith Richards, the Stones would warm up in every rehearsal by running through blues staples. So it's surprising they took nearly 55 years to charge admission to the private party. The result is *Blue & Lonesome*, a set of 12 covers with a distinctly Chess Records flavour, cut live with no overdubs and recorded over three days last December at Mark Knopfler's British Grove Studios in Chiswick. Long-time producer Don Was presided over the band, with Darryl Jones playing bass and Chuck Leavell's piano and keys added later from The Parlor studio in New Orleans.

Eric Clapton also happened to be in the studio and was drafted in to play, despite suffering from painful hands, on two songs. Far from a respectful trundle through the obvious standards, the setlist is the result of an enthusiastic dig through Mick Jagger's record collection. As well as Willie Dixon's *Just Like I Treat You*, there are numbers by Jimmy Reed, Eddie Taylor, Lightnin' Slim, Magic Sam, Howlin' Wolf and three Little Walter songs, including lead single *Just Your Fool* – on account of Walter's influence on the Stones frontman's underrated harp playing, which is front-and-centre throughout.

Without doubt, this is Sir Mick's album. Thriving on the raw and improvisational energy of the band and the feel in the room, the 73-year-old delivers emotionally charged vocals, punctuated by on-point harp phrases coated in distortion that strike like lightning and rumble like thunder. The rest of the Stones are content to show off their talent as ensemble players, just like a good blues band should – the rhythm section is dynamic and loping and the guitars are grimy and varied, with expressive licks and interlocking rhythms tumbling from Richards' and Wood's fingers right there in the moment.

Clapton, for his part, leans into the backbeat with toneful slide on *Everybody Knows About My Good Thing* and prowls menacingly around Dixon classic *I Can't Quit You Baby*, the album closer. Overall, *Blue & Lonesome* is a reminder of how much fun a band can still have with the blues, especially when they evidently love it as much as they did when they first heard it.

The Stones promise they'll get round to the original tracks they were working on when this project took over, but after this, surely most of their fans would rather just hear another helping of what the band clearly now does better than anyone else. **CM**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Chicago blues, Little Walter*

Robben Ford

LOST IN PARIS BLUES BAND

It turns out that The Rolling Stones aren't the only band to have knocked out an album of covers with a distinctly bluesy flavour this month, but unlike that much-heralded release we didn't see a collaboration between Ron Thal (Bumblefoot, and the guy who replaced Slash in Guns N' Roses), Robben Ford (the world's smoothest blues-jazz merchant) and John Jorgenson (gypsy jazz and country virtuoso) as being on the cards. It seems as though the three guitarists involved didn't, either – the 13-song set is the result of a spontaneous congregation in a Paris studio, when they were thrown together for a few days to experiment and jam. Despite the wealth of solos and polished musicianship on show, however, the resulting album is for the most part slick rather than exciting – with the notable exception being a rip-roaring version of *Tell Me*. **CM**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *All-star guitar collaborations*

Dolcetti

ARRIVER

It's rare for an album to reveal its influences so overtly and yet be entirely original. However, Italian band Dolcetti manage just that. On first listen, *Arriver* sounds like the sequel to Steve Vai's *Flex-Able*, but the quirky melodies and synth work dispel any notion you're listening to another Vai clone. It's one of the most interesting and surprising instrumental guitar albums this reviewer has heard in many years. **GB**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Steve Vai, Frank Zappa*

Sonata Arctica

THE NINTH HOUR

The Finnish power-metal outfit explain that the album title refers to a quote from The Bible at the point Jesus died on the cross. Here, that concept is updated, with humankind standing on the precipice of a nuclear war. Despite the album's gloomy premise, the music at least retains an upbeat energy and positive feel, and it's full of melodic high-energy songs and memorable guitar solos. **GB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Blind Guardian, Nightwish*

Jeff Healey

HOLDING ON: A HEAL MY SOUL COMPANION

In 2016, to celebrate what would've been the sadly missed Jeff Healey's 50th birthday, the Canadian guitarist's estate released *Heal My Soul*, a critically acclaimed 'lost album'. As a bookend to that release comes this extra helping from the vault, comprising five extra recordings from 1996 to 1998 and a 1999 concert in Norway. The studio songs are decent, but the live set sees Healey blazing his unique brand of jazz-inflected blues-rock. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *SRV, Philip Sayce, Eric Gales*

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DANIEL PUGSLEY

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

The Skindred bassist on He-Man, *Purple Haze*, New Orleans jazz tuba and flying fish...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"Outside of my bass, I've always used octavers as synths. So if that went down, it's a bit of a bummer. You play it and there's no sub – I like that sub thing to happen. At the moment, I'm using a Boss OC-3. I've got a bunch of OC-2s, which I think are superior, but I don't want to damage them."

2 In another life I would be...
"I think I'd do something food related. That's always been an interest. Getting to play in a band and travel is great, but... something in the culinary arts. You can tell a lot about people by the food they eat."

3 The moment that started it all...
"When I was a kid, I was watching He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe, and *Purple Haze* was on it. My mum didn't know what it was, but my neighbour did because he was a DJ. He recorded it on cassette for me, illegally."

4 The one that got away...
"I played StingRays back in 2004 and Ernie Ball's grandson gave me a black, four-string StingRay that he brought to one of our shows. It was the best bass, one of my favourites I've ever owned. We played in San Antonio and drove to Houston, and someone broke into our trailer on the way and stole it."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"We were playing a festival in Germany and they had lots of food stalls around selling food you wouldn't necessarily expect at a festival. I look around and Mikey [Demus, guitar] is losing his mind – someone had thrown a whole fish at him, and it hit him in the face and got in his beard. A whole fish. That's like getting punched in the face."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"If you don't feel it, don't play it. If you don't love what you're doing, don't do it."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up the bass...
"The Jaco thing, where you run through the sixths and go down in thirds, up and down the neck. It's just something I've done as long as I've played bass."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"My touring life has been revolutionised by moistened toilet tissue."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"You shouldn't have a guilty pleasure. Our music is very varied – I'm quite into RuPaul at the moment."

10 If I could play one thing...
"I got quite into New Orleans jazz and I'd really like to play tuba. I think it would be great fun. I like the bass register – that's where I'm at!"

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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